FEMALE QUEST IN MODERN AUSTRALIAN FICTION

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by

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DECLARATION

The thesis submitted is entirely the result of my own investigation. It has not already been accepted in substance for any degree, and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any other degree.

(Signed) A. S. Mitchell

SYNOPSIS

This thesis examines patterns of female quest in four modern Australian novels, and a contemporary woman's adventure story, Tracks.

The traditional view of women as static rather than dynamic, and femaleness as essential rather than existential, defines women according to their physical selves rather than their development in spiritual, intellectual, or emotional terms.[1]

In the literature chosen, the central drama of the female quest is the protagonist's struggle against the fragmenting and distorting socialisation into femininity, and her search for a strong and authentic understanding of who she is.

The prevalence of images of insanity and disease in female quest fiction suggests that this disjunction of inner truth and social convention results in painful self-division.

The psychological dynamic of the quest is often paralleled by physical journeying of some kind, usually a solitary escape from known places and people. Natural landscapes are particularly congenial places for spiritual insight and personal transformation.

Each of the questing characters reassesses her relationship to one or more significant men in her life. In general,

the male character has two opposing functions in the quest. He may be the dragon figure of unfair authority which the woman must successfully contest in order to realise her own powers. Alternatively, a happy love relationship with a man may be her reward for the achievement of self-possession.

Through the insights of a perspective changed by time and maturity, travel, or the psychological journeying of memory, the questing woman finds her treasure: the core of herself which remains apart from the demands and expectations of her society.

These quests end with the woman's future uncertain, and her social circumstances essentially unchanged. However, the reconciliation with her true self is a spiritual triumph in spite of the world's obduracy.

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Thanks to Kerry and Julia, who were true critics and friends.

NOTES

In each chapter, page references to the relevant text are included, after the first footnote, in parentheses within the text.

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INTRODUCTION

A number of mid- to late-twentieth century novels in English are primarily to do with the spiritual quest of a female protagonist. Doris Lessing's Children of Violence (1952-1969) series is perhaps the best known fictional exploration of a woman's search for knowledge and fulfilment in contemporary life.[1]

This thesis discusses recurrent themes in five texts which offer particularly interesting creations of questing female characters in modern Australian literature: Christina Stead's For Love Alone (1945), Patrick White's The Aunt's Story (1948), Elizabeth Harrower's The Watch Tower (1966), Jessica Anderson's Tirra Lirra by the River (1978), and Robyn Davidson's Tracks (1980). The four novels, and Tracks, are loosely linked by the concept of female quest, which serves as an appropriate framework within which they may be grouped for comparative study.

The three aspects of female quest fiction I have elected to examine in these novels are physical journeying as a metaphor of, or means to, revelation; the significance of male characters; and the prevalence of images of insanity and disease. The study is exploratory and descriptive, rather than an exhaustive critical or historical account of the literature.

Tracks differs from the novels in that it is genuinely autobiographical.[2] It is interesting not only from the point of view of what Davidson says about herself, but also because her experiences and concerns mirror so closely the quest patterns in the novels. Tracks suffers from the use of cliché, and the artlessness of the private diarist's

observations made public. Its value lies in its absorbing immediacy as a first-hand account of a woman's quest.

The central character of For Love Alone, Teresa Hawkins, has a hunger for possession of herself, for knowledge, and for the power to act on her ideals.[3] Her impelling desire is larger than the desire for love, although in her youth and unworldliness she identifies all her aspirations with romantic passion. The novel is an intense study of Teresa's inner life in the years from nineteen to her mid-twenties, as she explores true and false avenues to fulfilment. Though For Love Alone ends with a declaration of independence rather than with tangible accomplishments, there is a hopeful sense that Teresa's quest will prove rewarding in spite of the bitterness of the struggle.

The Watch Tower is the least heartening of these female quests, because it concentrates on the psychology of oppression rather than on the positive aspects of women learning to be the agents of their own liberation.[4] Clare Vaizey's quest for self-possession is extremely precarious. It is a mute, inward struggle to keep in touch with true feelings and judgments which her outward circumstances force her to disguise. Because she is younger than these other questing figures, she must endure a particularly demoralising domestic life until she has the adult status to step outside it. Her quest is a prolonged fight for psychic survival, fuelled by a slowly growing awareness that such suffering and fragmentation is repugnant, and must stop. Like Teresa Hawkins, Clare Vaizey's quest involves

freeing herself from the influence of a corrupting male figure. At the close of The Watch Tower Clare is beginning to unfold her cramped self in the world. Her train journey into the country suggests an urge to retrieve something of the lost innocence and authenticity of childhood.

The Aunt's Story[5] and Tirra Lirra by the River[6] differ from these two novels in that they have an older woman as their central questing character. Annis Pratt discusses the literary hero who at middle life or later, eschews domestic enclosure and passes through a process of rebirth:

> For the woman past her "prime", as for the young hero not yet approaching hers, visions of authenticity come more easily than to women in the midst of their social experience.[7]

Theodora Goodman and Nora Porteous are at the other end of the spectrum from young women like Teresa and Clare, who resist pressure towards the kind of circumscribed life the older women have put behind them.

Nora's quest to integrate herself with herself (rather than with the social world, a skill she has consciously and contemptuously acquired), involves a private and honest reappraisal of her personal history. This requires considerable courage, as her memory throws up painful and embarrassing episodes as well as forgotten glimmers of creativity and personal strength. She must finally face the dark side of her marriage to Colin, a male ogre figure who bears relation to Jonathan Crow in For Love Alone, and Felix Shaw in The Watch Tower. Nora's quest seems the most successful of the five, perhaps because her retrospection is informed by robust humour and wisdom. Nora's failures, mistakes and

losses blend into the colourful tapestry of her retold life, seeming less poignant than they would be in isolation, or within a different narrative structure. It is reassuring to have in mind Nora's present recovered self when she is recalling sordid or depressing aspects of her earlier life.

The middle-aged Theodora's quest in The Aunt's Story is a similar extended voyage into the emotions of the past. This quest, which links several changes of time and place, is the psychological process by which she exorcises the long-repressed demons of hate and fear, and seeks the freedom which is to be at peace with her own nature. However, Theodora's efforts to gain understanding and acceptance of herself are much more tortuous and much less rewarding than those of Nora in Tirra Lirra by the River. Theodora is literally driven mad by the process. Although there are strong correspondences between this novel and the others, the ending of The Aunt's Story differs from the usual quest pattern in that it claims a split life of inner integrity and outward capitulation as a kind of spiritual victory.

These novels naturally have an Australian specificity, but they are not so national or different from other modern female quest fiction in English that they form an identifiable sub-culture. This thesis largely ignores their Australian context, because that is irrelevant to the wider, shared literary context, and the universality of the quest theme. The novels have much in common with British, American and Continental fiction of the same kind.

My use of the term quest emphasizes the heroic,

exploratory, and even mystical nature of the female character's aspiration. It places these novels within the general quest tradition in literature, as identified by theorists Carl Jung, Northrop Frye, and Joseph Campbell. These archetypal approaches have provided outlines of the psycho-mythological development of the male, as reflected in anthropology, mythology and literature. Archetypal interpretations of literature tend to isolate two basic quest patterns: the linear narrative of the hero who embarks on a road of trials, struggles with temptation and diversion from his true path, wins an elixir, and returns to bestow the boon of his vision on civilization; and the vertical descent into the psyche, which is usually a rebirth journey. Jung, for instance, distinguishes between the quest of the adolescent for maturity, and the experienced adult's urge for rebirth and full individuation.

If the quest for identity and rebirth experiences is seen to admit women as human participants, rather than as handmaidens or rewards of male quests only, the archetypal approach is helpful in defining patterns of female heroism in literature.[8] A number of feminist theorists has employed archetypal criticism in studying women's psychology and art. They claim that recurring images, symbols and narrative forms suggest strongly rooted female patterns of thought and experience. The ideas of Jung, Frye and Campbell inform the criticism of Annis Pratt in Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction,[9] Carol Pearson and Katherine Pope in The Female Hero in American and British Literature,[10] and Phyllis Chesler in Women and Madness.[11] Pratt and Chesler broaden traditional archetypal analysis by replacing

classical male gods and mythical heroes with specifically female deities and historical or folkloric figures. Demeter's search for her abducted daughter Persephone, Daphne's transmutation into a laurel tree to escape Apollo, Medea's sanguinity and tragic suffering, and Joan of Arc's betrayal and apotheosis are explored as powerful symbolic representations of female life, with modern literary counterparts.

This kind of perspective on literature about women makes visible various patterns of female quest. Annis Pratt suggests that women writers consistently create narratives manifesting an acute tension between what any normal human being might desire, and what a woman must become:

> Our quests for being are thwarted on every side by what we are told to be and do, which is different from what men are told to be and do: when we seek an identity based on human personhood rather than on gender, we stumble about in a landscape whose signposts indicate retreats from, rather than ways to, adulthood.[12]

The female hero in modern fiction is typically engaged in the struggle between a desire for authenticity, and those masks that society expects her to wear in defiance of her true selfhood. The desire to experience the totality of the self may be seen as the primary motivation of the protagonist in female quest fiction. She yearns to exercise her individual capacity for significant work, intellectual growth, and sexual and emotional expression.

Lacking models for the truly heroic life, women are often seen to turn to the myth of romantic love as a guide to fulfilment. Modern writers commonly pass ironic comment on this tendency by setting up a male figure as an

obstacle to the quest, a novel variation of the dragon-slaying of the mythic hero. Traditionally, the antagonists of quest are sinister figures like witches, ogres, monsters and magicians. Frye claims that the central form of quest-romance is the dragon-killing theme, exemplified in the stories of St. George and Perseus:

> Often the dragon guards a hoard: the quest for buried treasure has been a central theme of romance from the Siegfried cycle to Nostromo. Treasure means wealth, which in mythopoeic romance often means wealth in its ideal forms, power and wisdom.[13]

Literature of female quest suggests that progress may depend upon a woman challenging the authority of an actual man, like a father-figure or a lover. The dragon may also be within herself, in the form of habitual deference to dominant male ideology. By circumventing or debunking the threatening male dragon, the woman gains insight and new personal power. Chapter Two discusses the male as seducer-villain in The Watch Tower, For Love Alone, Tirra Lirra by the River and Tracks.

The love of men is not always a threat to the questing female character, however. As Stead shows in For Love Alone, feeling genuine passion is liberating for a woman who is self-possessed. Men can neither save nor damn a woman who has reclaimed the treasure of her integrity. In Tracks, Davidson's ambivalent attitude to the photographer Rick reflects the tension between her need for nurture, and her fear of distraction from her goal. Clare Vaizey's relationship with Bernard is similarly fraught with uncertainty.

Because the conventional female role so thoroughly precludes self-enhancing independence and strength, the questing woman typically withdraws from familiar people and places, and enters a private, inner world.[14] The quest for selfhood takes place within personal space, rather than within the larger society. It is a spiritual quest of the individual consciousness, rather than a social quest for integration into a community.

This psychological dynamic may be paralleled by physical journeying of some kind, often a solitary escape from known surroundings into the riskiness and promise of a new and strange environment. Theodora Goodman, Teresa Hawkins, Nora Porteous, and Robyn Davidson embark on actual as well as metaphysical journeys in their quests for wholeness. Chapter One investigates the connection between spiritual search and physical journeying in these texts, and discusses the natural world as a source of healing and regeneration away from the alienations of male society.

The female character's psychic survival during the quest may require her authentic self to remain hidden from others. As Chapter Three shows, this conflict between the true self and conventional images of womanhood may lead to an experience of mental or physical distress. In The Watch Tower, Clare's choice of the split life leads to isolation and psychological damage which is arrested only when she summons the courage to leave home. Pearson and Pope describe another perverse strategy of survival:

> ...in order to overcome the chaos and confusion at any price, a woman may turn on her own heroic self, which social requirements and the unbearable pain of the conflict finally convince her to destroy.[15]

In The Aunt's Story, Theodora's efforts to destroy her monstrous self, and her eventual public surrender to those who prescribe the reasonable life, suggest this process. The female protagonists of Tirra Lirra by the River and For Love Alone also experience the terror and isolation of a confused identity. Robyn Davidson describes a similar female alienation in Tracks. Chapter Three looks at the images of insanity and disease in these female quests. Drawing on the psychological theories of Laing, this thesis proposes personal fragmentation as a common female strategy of survival rather than a failure to cope.

The endings of these quests differ according to the woman's circumstances and abilities, but each has a muted air. The sense of personal growth is tangible, but the quest commonly concludes with the woman's future uncertain and largely unimaginable. Will Teresa pursue her goal of study in Europe? How will Clare live in the country? What will Robyn Davidson do to alleviate the flatness of a return to ordinary life? Tirra Lirra by the River is the exception to this blankness. Nora's acceptance of the narrowing of her life towards death is quietly sad, but not disconcerting.

Joseph Campbell claims that quest endings are normally difficult and unsatisfying:

> The first problem of the returning hero is to accept as real, after an experience of the soul-satisfying vision of fulfillment, the passing joys and sorrows, banalities and noisy obscenities of life.[16]

However, the crossing of the return threshold seems to be a particularly difficult imaginative leap for writers of female quest. Although she may find stability and integrity

in being reconciled to her true self, the female quester is rarely seen to achieve reintegration into the life from which she has become estranged. Pearson and Pope point out that the heroic exit doesn't promise success, but it does provide independence and self-knowledge as rewards for effort.[17] Nevertheless, the reservedness in female quest endings implies that any insight achieved is inoperable as well as hard-won.

This open-endedness raises the question of whether female characters in literature about male-dominated societies can ever actively express continuing personal liberation in a way we would find credible. Modern fiction of female adventure seems difficult to end with spirit and conviction in the present. However, these novels are heartening in their implication that self-reclamation for women is a difficult and prolonged process which is rewarding in ways which defy simple social evaluation.

CHAPTER ONE

PHYSICAL JOURNEYING, NATURE AND SPIRITUAL SEARCH

In female quest literature, the compulsion to undertake physical, independent travel is closely connected with the woman's inner voyage of self-discovery. The need to escape past or present circumstances which define her unnaturally is one aspect of the urge to travel. It is also a flight to something, the tantalizing possibility of personal integrity and the freedom to express it outside the normal strictures of female life.

Heroines in modern literary quests sometimes find this peace and sureness of self in the isolation of natural landscapes like deserts and forests. In Tracks and The Aunt's Story, nature is a source of solace, companionship and independence for the questing woman. Davidson experiences a cosmic unity in which the boundaries of her self and the external world melt and merge:

> And as I walked through that country, I was becoming fully involved with it in a most intense and yet not fully conscious way. The motions and patterns and connections of things became apparent on a gut level. I didn't just see the animal tracks, I knew them. I didn't just see the bird, I knew it in relationship to its actions and effects. My environment began to teach me about itself without my full awareness of the process. It became an animate being of which I was a part (p.195).

She finds that 'The self in a desert becomes more and more like the desert', being stripped of non-meaningful habits and concerning itself with realities related to survival (p.197).

Theodora's quest to recover the clarity of her self as a young child is given symbolic force in the metaphysical landscape of Abyssinia. Meroë is the spiritual state of wholeness she identifies with her serene world-view as a child on the country property of this name. The ability to feel at one with nature is a consistent metaphor for Theodora's internal harmony and integrity:

> She would lie in the water. And soon her thin brown body was the shallow, browner water. She would not think. She would drift. As still as a stick. And as thin (p.38).

Theodora's loss of inner balance is commonly matched by the rupture of the sympathetic bond with nature, as when she shoots the little hawk. Destructive natural forces like storms and fire mirror the violence and chaos of her emotions.

Annis Pratt and Carol Christ are two contemporary theorists who have written about naturistic epiphanies and nature as a refuge or touchstone in female quests for lost selfhood.[1] In her discussion of 'the green-world archetype', Pratt defines the importance of this identification with nature:

> Nature, then, becomes an ally of the woman hero, keeping her in touch with her selfhood, a kind of talisman that enables her to make her way through the alienations of male society.[2]

Carol Christ suggests that the spiritual quest for vision or cosmic power requires isolation, which is most likely to be found in remote natural landscapes. In her analysis of Margaret Atwood's novel Surfacing, she draws connections between women's experience of nature, and the quest structure. The woman awakens from a male-defined world to one

defined by her own feeling and judgment, heralding a movement from victimhood to power:

> Correlative to awakening or surfacing, this movement may also open the protagonist to the experience of great cosmic powers which ground her newly felt sense of her own power.[3]

Carol Christ argues that the experience of nature as a great power seems to reflect a female standpoint in the modern West, because the biological experiences of women enable them to retain a sense of closeness to nature, which men tend to lose in urbanized cultures.[4] Though this assertion begs a great many questions, it is an interesting attempt to account for the special value of nature in modern novels of female quest.

For questing female characters, physical travel is often an extreme deed. It is an adventure into the unknown and,so,a test of the spirit. The break from home, family, society or the past which the journey entails is achieved with difficulty and at the risk of losing these props to identity and sources of meaning. The questing heroine acts on her sense of dissatisfaction with her life, and chooses unfamiliar landscapes and new demands on her capabilities. Like the Greek hero Odysseus, women travellers in literature experience the uncertainties and dangers of dislocation. But unlike his fated journeying, theirs is a chosen struggle. In the modern female quest, Ithaca is not the home left behind, but the spiritual sense of belonging, of having arrived where one aspired to be in a metaphysical sense.

Usually, the spiritual quest is not satisfied by the movement away and the traveller accepts the necessity of

return, or at least an end to wandering. This is not a defeat, because the gains of self-understanding and growth in travel carry over into ordinary living. But there is a sense of sadness in the end of the quest, because its special intensity cannot be sustained in everyday life.

Two Australian writers employ Odyssey motifs in their novels of female quest: Patrick White in The Aunt's Story, and Christina Stead in For Love Alone. In both of these novels the heroine leaves Australia some way through the story and the sphere of action is transferred to Europe (and on to America in the case of The Aunt's Story). As with other Australian literature of female quest, the actual journey is only part of the imagination's quest. It is not the leaving of Australia which is the object, but the journey as a means to or experience of an authentic female identity.

In an article discussing For Love Alone as a female odyssey, Susan Higgins observes that it is '... not a classic case of the expatriate novel in which the brilliant and sensitive artist is forced to fly the nets of a dull and repressive homeland, like Stephen Dedalus.'[5] Rather, she claims, Stead works against the traditional pattern of exile and return in the fiction of Boyd, Henry Handel Richardson and White, and makes the life of the wanderer an image of freedom. Similarly, Theodora's travels in The Aunt's Story are prompted by her sudden emancipation from the past in middle age, not dissatisfaction with Australian culture. She wants to enter all experience which might offer itself

to her as a transient.

The psychological dimension of travel is apparent in each of the five female quests I have discussed. In Tirra Lirra By the River Anderson's heroine travels in both time and place, reconstructing her experience of emigration to London as a young woman, and the events which preceeded her return to Australia in the present. In Harrower's The Watch Tower, Clare's quest takes on new possibilities for fulfilment in the physical movement away from the moral and intellectual provinciality of a familiar urban Australian environment. I have concentrated my discussion of the interdependence of travel and spiritual search on the questing female characters in the White and Stead novels, and Davidson's Tracks, because they exemplify this pattern most clearly.

In her discussion of feminine self-assertion, or 'heroinism' in women's writing, Ellen Moers makes some interesting claims about the literary history of the 'traveling woman:, the woman who moves, who acts, who copes with vicissitude and adventure.'[6] Moers says that from the time of Mrs. Radcliffe, the Gothic novel was a device to send maidens on distant and exciting journeys without offending the proprieties. It was a feminine substitute for the picaresque. She acknowledges that indoor travel in the Gothic setting produced a richer literary tradition than outdoor travel because it was more possible for women. The haunted passage-ways of the Gothic castle had more dramatic immediacy for the nineteenth century woman reader than the exotic, impossible landscapes of

vaguely European location.

Modern Australian writing has a tradition of female journeying. The romantic spirit of adventure is still with us in novels about women's travels. Its expression is more complicated than in the early Gothic fantasies, however. Modern travelling heroines cannot be saved from villians and whisked home to safety, and their unruliness cannot be ascribed to adolescence.

Moers compares the outdoor activities of the male heroes in early novels with those of the female. A Tom Jones could establish himself as a hero by '... blacking an eye, climbing a tree, fighting a duel, joining a regiment, poaching, roistering and tramping. For heroines, the mere walking was suspect.'[7] She claims that, 'A whole history of literary feminism might be told in terms of the metaphor of walking.'[8] The metaphor of walking is certainly pervasive in twentieth century female quest fiction.[9] Susan Higgins observes that in Stead's For Love Alone the points of crisis in Teresa's psychological journey are expressed 'in the kinetic imagery of unsatisfied desire.'[10] Teresa walks long distances in frenetic haste whenever the walls of her life seem to be closing in on her. The exhausting miles traversed between her work and the house in Fisherman's Bay are a money-saving measure, but their significance is deeper than that. Teresa needs to believe herself an active agent, capable of using her physical and emotional momentum to escape from a stultifying life. That she has the will to endure arduous walking is a reassuring proof of her ability to overcome difficulties in her path

to freedom.

In Tirra Lirra By The River, Nora's long, tiring walks are opportunities for communing with herself away from the influence of people who wish to control her. Walking is a symbol of the independent womanhood she harbours within herself but cannot yet exercise openly. When she confines herself to indoors in depressed, agorophobic spells, she is closest to relinquishing that self. In The Watch Tower, Laura wanders confused around inner Sydney in a crisis of personal identity. For her the aimlessness of walking is not comforting, but frightening, because she has lost faith in the Laura she used to be before she married Felix. Clare reclaims her psychological liberty only by walking away from Felix's house altogether.

Robyn Davidson's long desert trek is a freeing of the real self from the cultural expectations and habits of middle-class femaleness. In The Aunt's Story, Theodora steps casually off a train in the American Mid-West and wanders through the woods until she finds a deserted cabin to live in. Her lack of place in the world of fixed objects and appearances is expressed by her spontaneity of physical movement.

None of the Australian novels I have mentioned, nor Tracks, gives us a satisfied female ex-adventurer. Nora is perhaps closest to fulfilment, but she is near death and finds peace in complete retreat from the world. Theodora goes mad, and the other novels end at critical points: Clare leaves for the countryside alone, and Teresa is poised to act on her convictions about personal liberty

and happiness. Robyn Davidson is to re-enter the life she left several years earlier, with considerable qualms. In each case the writer breaks off the narrative when circumstances change the nature of the quest. There seems some evidence for Moers' perception of '... A special female melancholy and weariness towards the close of the books that women writers have structured around the heroinism of travel and adventure.'[11]

Robyn Davidson's Tracks is a fragment of autobiography covering the three years the author spent in Central Australia in the mid 1970's. It is a personal record of her quest for an experience long dreamed about, to travel in the central desert by camel, Tracks is not written in diary form, although the maps and photos and the powerful immediacy of her descriptions of the landscape lodge it within the tradition of the Australian desert explorer's journal.

Like Eyre, Sturt and Giles in the nineteenth century, Davidson is awed by the heat and space of the desert. Her response to the Aboriginal inhabitants is, like theirs, uneasy, but due to the enlightened white's guilt rather than fear of attack. The journals of the men who first explored the arid interior of the continent were not just dry, scientific records. They did, at times, convey to the reader a sense of the personality of the man; his own response to what he sees and experiences, and his motive in pitting himself against a harsh environment.

Davidson's story recreates that drama and excitement in her intimate record of a woman's explorations in

the same hostile landscape, a hundred years later. The author's personality is expressed as she records her experience with candour and wit. The strongest impression left by the book is of the woman herself, her gritty humour, her tetchiness and her fierce independence.

Although Tracks is not fiction, in some ways it reads like a novel. Davidson is telling a story with all the elements of adventure fiction: an exotic setting, a central character who sets herself a difficult task, an epic journey attended by frustrations and small victories, and an ambivalent emotional involvement with an intruding photographer.

In spite of disclaimers like 'If I could bumble my way across a desert, than [sic] anyone could do anything', the author has chosen a narrative form in which she must appear the heroine. The nature of the personal record invites reader ingenuousness. Because the events and feelings related are seen to be close to the real, closer than fiction for instance, they are presumed sacred, beyond question or criticism. However, autobiography may be as much fiction as fiction. It is the product of memory and reconstruction, and its truths are true only to a degree.

In the final page of Tracks, Davidson tacitly acknowledges the unreliability of her own retrospective:

> As I look back on the trip now, as I try to sort out fact from fiction, try to remember how I felt at that particular time, or during that particular incident, try to relive those memories that have been buried so deep, and distorted so ruthlessly, there is one clear fact that emerges...(p.254).

The 'I' of any written communication is a version or angle of the self. It is impossible to be all of yourself at once on the page. The questing heroine of Tracks is a construct of Davidson herself, and probably a false or incomplete guide to the author at times.

This narrator unreliability explains Davidson's self-contradictions, and the occasional sense of phoniness in the writing. In the desert, Davidson professes to perceive time as becoming elastic and accommodating, and herself as flowing with it, but her obsession with imposing structures on her experience reveals itself in her annoyance at things not going 'according to plan.' She is often more concerned with what the trip 'should' have been, than she is open to what it becomes:

> I walked the twenty miles through country that should have mended me but which I did not allow even to penetrate. I was depressed. I felt cheated and put upon, and my face was like a viola (p.142).

Sometimes, Davidson falls into the trap of believing her own publicity. Her writing about the desert's effect on her is often crass and naïve:

> Time melted — became meaningless. I don't think I have ever felt so good in my entire life. Eddie made me notice things I had not noticed before — noises, tracks. And I began to see how it all fitted together. The land was not wild but tame, bountiful, benign, giving, as long as you knew how to see it, how to be part of it (pp.178-179).

She also overstates her interest to the media. Their pursuit of her may have more to do with the materialistic need for a story than her appeal to the 'passionless, heartless, aching' psyche of the era.

It is refreshing to come across the occasional

satiric thrust at the notion of quest:

> Nothing portentous or grand was really happening to me. I had been expecting some miraculous obvious change to occur. It was all nice of course and even fun sometimes, but hey, where was the great clap of thunder that, as everyone knows, knocks people sideways in deserts. I was exactly the same person that I was when I began (p.136).

On the whole, Davidson is much more convincing when she admits to uncertainty and disappointment. After five months of travel, she reviews her experience with quiet honesty:

> None of it had gone according to plan, none of it had lived up to my expectations. There'd been no point at which I could say, 'Yes, this is what I did it for,' or 'Yes, this is what I wanted for myself.' In fact, most of it had been simply tedious and tiring (p.191).

That Davidson is throughout preoccupied with the nature and significance of her journey into the desert places Tracks firmly within the genre of contemporary female quest literature. Her search for integrity and wholeness of being takes the form of a physical journey. She travels away from modern urban life to an arid, ancient landscape. In Tracks, as in other female quest literature, a mystical identification with nature is seen to heal and liberate the culturally damaged female self.[12]

In her article 'Women and Nature in Modern Fiction', Annis Pratt considers the attributes of female naturism by comparing male and female Bildungsromane, novels of the development of the personality of the protagonist. Her view of the male Bildungsroman is represented by Joseph Campbell's claim that the quest of the hero is a 'road of

trials' that consummates in the simultaneous discovery of woman and earth.[13] Against this, Pratt poses Simone de Beauvoir, for whom nature plays the role in the development of the young girl of splendid refuge from the self-destructive lures of masculine expectations:

> 'Nature is one of the realms [women writers] have most lovingly explored,' continues Beauvoir, 'For the young girl, for the woman who has not fully abdicated, nature represents what woman herself represents for man: herself and her negation, a kingdom and a place of exile; the whole in the guise of the other.'[14]

Pratt concludes that the heroine of the female genre is more likely to view herself as co-extensive with the green world, and the hero of the male genre to view his heroine and the green world as co-extensive parts of each other, but rightfully subordinate to him.

Considering naturism in Australian writing, the distinction seems valid. In Patrick White's novel of quest Voss, for instance, the woman Laura is mystically connected with the earth Voss traverses.[15] In Davidson's Tracks, which has similarities of location and action, moments of illumination are expressed by a humbling sense of her connection with the ancient Australian earth. Voss and Tracks invite comparison in a number of respects. Although Voss is a far more complex and masterly work than Tracks, they share the metaphysical theme of the possibility of reconciling social and spiritual worlds. Both picture life as a journey, and use desert travel as a symbol of psychological trial.

However, Voss' quest seems archetypically male. He seeks conquest of the wilderness, and over his own emotions and vulnerabilities. White suggests the exaggerated

masculinity of this attitude by offering Laura's urban quest as a foil to it. Through mutual desert images, White conveys their shared experience of confusion, suffering, and self-enclosure. Both are socially marooned and mistrustful, and both have crises of faith. Yet there are important differences between them. Laura wants to save Voss from failure and self-damnation by her love and faith, drawn from her struggle for humility. His arrogance, and his ignominious death, teach her the strengths of self-acceptance and social tolerance.

In Tracks, Davidson's attitude to the conventions and banalities of society is very like that of Voss and Laura. Like Laura, her quest is less for victory over herself, than for the courage to look deeply into herself and risk transformation.

That Davidson's desert camel trek has a metaphysical significance which descriptions such as 'adventure story' do not capture is suggested by the epigraph to Tracks. It is an excerpt from The Golden Notebook, Doris Lessing's novel about a modern woman who seeks to understand and connect the disparate parts of her life through keeping different coloured journals. The golden notebook of the title has the function of integrating them. Lessing's language has strong symbolic force:

> Anna knew she had to cross the desert. Over it, on the far side, were mountains — purple and orange and grey. The colours of the dream were extraordinarily beautiful and vivid... The dream marked a change in Anna, in her knowledge of herself. In the desert she was alone, and there was no water, and she was a long way from the springs. She woke knowing that if she was to cross the desert she must shed burdens.

Davidson wants to cross an actual desert, and Tracks tells the story of how she accomplishes this. But there is another story in Tracks, partly submerged, in the writer's oblique sense of a more important journey taking place inside her head. To succeed as a writer, the Anna of Lessing's novel must nurture her precious inner life and shed attitudes and relationships which drag her down. For Davidson, the primary impact of her solitary trek is the psychological change it brings. Her body hardens and tans and becomes efficient, but the important adjustments take place within, as she focusses on her thoughts and feelings about being who she is.

The puzzling, frustrating process of working through things by self-analysis is as taxing as the demands made on her physical endurance and skills. It seems that the travelling conditions of physical extremity and isolation within an austere landscape trigger this process for Davidson. The tracks of the title are symbolic as well as actual, suggesting a mental process, or track of thought, which must be followed through to its end.

It is clear from the beginning that Davidson associates the space and emptiness of the desert with lightness and freedom of spirit. Early in Tracks she gives the reasons and needs behind the trip, in the half-form they then had:

> A couple of years before, someone had asked me a question: 'What is the substance of the world in which you live?'... It took me an hour to answer it, and when I did, my answer seemed to come directly from the subconscious: 'Desert, purity, fire, air, hot wind, space, sun, desert desert desert.' It had surprised

> me, I had no idea those symbols had been working so strongly within me (p.50).

There are two further reasons — wanting to travel in the desert as a way of getting to know Aborigines directly and simply; and boredom with the repetitions and half-finished projects of her life:

> [I] had been sick of carrying around the self-indulgent negativity which was so much the malaise of my generation, my sex and my class (p.50).

Davidson claims that she 'had made the choice instinctively, and only later had given it meaning', and that 'the trip had never been billed in my mind as an adventure in the sense of something to be proved.' The most difficult thing had been the decision to act, and the rest was merely tenacity:

> One really could do anything one had decided to do whether it were changing a job, moving to a new place, divorcing a husband or whatever, one really could act to change and control one's life; and the procedure, the process, was its own reward (pp.50-51).

During the trip, she realises that its significance is not the end point of reaching the ocean, but is diffused throughout it.

When her camels wander away and cannot be tracked by land, Davidson arranges to search for them by light aircraft:

> And as I sat, straining my eyes out the window of the plane, something rose to the surface which had been buried since the moment I decided on this trip, more than two years before. I didn't have to go through with it. Losing the camel was the perfect excuse (p.88).

Yet even as she is tempted to renege, she recognizes the process by which she has attempted difficult things in the past — not to think of the consequences, but to close

her eyes and jump in. In opposition to 'that cowardly self [which] had discovered an unburnt bridge by which to return to the past' there is 'that other self, who lived in dream and fantasy... All passion, no sense, no instinct for self preservation.' The two selves 'were now warring with each other. I wanted desperately to find those camels, and I wanted desperately not to find them.' When they are finally spotted, 'that was the point at which all my disparate selves agreed to do the trip.'

This push and pull of mood and motivation, which Davidson perceives as a warring of internal selves, is not difficult to understand. Her journey promises both greater terror and risk than her previous way of life, and also great potential healing and joy.

The practical problems of buying equipment and learning skills consume her attention from then on: 'I wanted to do the thing on my own without outside interference or help. An attempt at a pure gesture of independence.' She finds that the learning to make and fix things is one of the most excruciating things she has had to cope with. Tools and machinery are a 'no-woman's-land' where fogs of ignorance and clumsiness obscure her way. It is apparent that such a journey as this is a different prospect for a woman than a man, given discrepancies in conventional expectations of male and female behaviour.

For Davidson, her personal and private gesture ultimately becomes in part the property of the international magazine which sponsors her in return for first rights to her story. Although their photographer, Rick, was to make

only three brief visits during the trip:

> ... I knew that this would alter irrevocably the whole texture of what I wanted to do, which was to be alone, to test, to push, to unclog my brain of all its extraneous debris, not to be protected, to be stripped of all the social crutches, not to be hampered by any outside interference whatsoever, well meant or not (p.102).

She is resentful enough of these controlling factors outside herself to claim bitterly that the trip is seeming to belong to everybody but herself. Even yielding to pressure to take along a two-way radio is seen by her as 'a tiny symbol of defeat.' Yet a page later, she says more happily:

> From the day the thought came into my head 'I am going to enter a desert with camels' to the day I felt the preparations to be completed, I had built something intangible but magical for myself which had rubbed off a little on to other people, and I would probably never have the opportunity to do anything quite as demanding or as fulfilling as that ever again (p.106).

Her father and sister come to Alice Springs to see her off. The unspoken tensions and protective bonds between them, which Davidson suggests had their basis in the death of her mother, focus an emotional charge on the trip. She feels that there is an expectation that 'all the stupid, meaningless pain our family had suffered might somehow be symbolically absolved, laid to rest through this gesture of mine. As if I could walk it away for all of us' (p.109). We are not witness to her re-union with her family after the trip, but there is a sense that, for herself, the trip does clear away mental debris from the past.

Once by herself and on her way, Davidson is intoxicated with the landscape. She feels:

> As if I were made of some fine bright, airy, musical substance and that in my chest was a source of power that would any minute explode, releasing thousands of singing birds. All around me was magnificence. Light, power, space and sun. And I was walking into it. I was going to let it make me or break me. A great weight lifted off my back. I felt like dancing and calling to the great spirit. Mountains pulled and pushed, wind roared down chasms. I followed eagles suspended from cloud horizons. I wanted to fly in the unlimited blue of the morning (p.111).

This perception of herself as co-extensive with the land recurs throughout Tracks, often accompanied by imagery of flight, as here.

Davidson's initial optimism and joy is soon deflated by the heat, the intrusiveness of the camera, and the arduous loading and unloading of gear:

> The great spirit had fled, leaving me to my own resources... It was preposterous thinking I would make it unscathed two thousand miles to the ocean. Good season or no, the desert is no place for a dilettante (p.112).

The closing passage of the first part of Tracks, 'Alice Sprung', has the author exultant: 'It was done. I was on my own. For real. At last.' The moment has strong implications of spiritual quest: 'The last burning bridge back to my old self collapsed. I was on my own' (p.115). She now thinks of 'I' as her present and future self, though events prove that the encumbrances of socially constructed femininity are not shuffled off without effort and pain.

Part Two, 'Shedding Burdens', traces this process of self-renewal in travel, and in establishing an affinity

with a natural landscape.

Davidson describes the difficulty of choosing a route across country in central Australia, when tracks (defined as 'a mark made across the landscape by the repeated passage of a vehicle') may be poorly defined, circuitous, or dead-end. She learns to trust her instincts and not rely on maps. It is implicit in this observation that independence of spirit is learned the same way. Social blueprints for femininity are no more reliable as guides than outback maps.

Her pride in her new physical competence is palpable. On a solid, hearty diet she feels like 'a cast-iron amazon; cuts and gashes vanished in a day, I could see almost as well at night as I could in sunlight, and I grew muscles on my shit' (p.123). When she has to cope with emergencies like bucking camels and marauding wild bulls, Davidson is sobered by the responsibility for her own survival:

> I was becoming very careful and I was coming right back down to earth, where the desert was larger than I could comprehend. And not only was space an ungraspable concept, but my description of time needed reassessment (p.132).

She realizes that the need for such arbitrary structures as the time of day and rituals of eating and sleeping is based on fear of chaos.

Though she speaks of the country's power to 'mend' her, various distractions and changes of mood obstruct the healing process. The public aspect of the trip is a continuing source of frustration. In retrospect, she sees that she was getting more involved with an article about the trip than

the trip itself:

> It did not dawn on me that already I was beginning to see it as a story for other people, with a beginning and an ending (pp.144-145).

She is depressed by the knowledge that 'the trip would not, could not, be what I had planned and wanted it to be' (p.145).

She is also disheartened in her attempts to enter Aboriginal reality, feeling 'like a whitefella tourist on the outside looking in'. The trip begins to seem pointless, and she is tempted to give up. This bleak mental state alters her perspective on the landscape:

> Step after step after step, the interminable walking dragged out, pulling my thoughts downward into spirals. The country seemed alien, faded, muted, the silence hostile, overwhelming (p.155).

This is the darkest part of her journey. Constant tension and a sense of failure make progress seem achingly slow, and the land malevolent:

> The moon, cold marble and cruel, pushed down on me, sucked at me, I could not hide from it, even in dream (p.157).

Travelling across endless sandhills, and short of water, she develops symptoms of schizophrenia:

> ... I woke suddenly, and tried to gather myself from a dream I could not remember. I was split. I woke into limbo and could not find myself. There were no reference points, nothing to keep the world controlled and bound together. There was nothing but chaos and the voices (p.158).

Finally, she comes out of the terrible ocean of sand, to a rock escarpment. Her emotional and physical exhaustion is like that of hauling oneself on to solid land after a

shipwreck:

> The rocks were heavy and dark and strong. They rose up like an island. I crawled over this giant spine, where it emerged from the waves, in a fuzz of green. I looked back to the immensity of where I had been (pp.159-160).

As she adapts to the desert environment, Davidson becomes more and more conscious of herself as an animal. The animal, particularly bird, imagery of her language reflects this; 'I slept deeply and dreamlessly, woke early and rose as easily and cleanly as an eagle leaving its nest' (p.160). Her attitude to her body changes too. She feels virtually immune to cold and pain, food becomes 'something you put in your mouth to give you energy to walk' and towards the end of the trip, like a wild animal, she is nervous of people:

> By now I was utterly deprogrammed. I walked along naked usually, clothes being not only putrid but unnecessary. My skin had been baked a deep terra-cotta brown and was the constituency of harness leather (p.211).

She 'honestly could not remember, or put into context, etiquette.' Did it matter if all the buttons had gone from her shirt and trousers? Though it didn't matter to her if her menstrual blood ran down her leg, would others feel the same way? Her body functions become a matter of indifference, or child-like amusement.

Davidson claims that her awareness of the absurdity of social custom has never really left her since:

> I have slowly regained a sense of the niceties, but I think, I hope, that I will always see the obsession with social graces and female modesty for the perverted crippling insanity it really is (p.212).

Part Three of Tracks, 'Little Bit Long Way', covers

the author's detour through Aboriginal tribal grounds with the tribal Elder Eddie as escort. She admires his self-possession, warmth, and 'a kind of rootedness, a substantiality that immediately commanded respect' (p.165). Being in Eddie's company makes her realise the limitations of her cultural set. She feels torn between two different concepts of time: the elastic, accommodating Aboriginal time which is more suited to the circumstances; and the 'structure, regimentation, orderedness' of habit. Eddie's sense of being totally at home in the land and at one with it, rubs off on her.

This cultural shift has a dramatic effect on her sense of potency and integrity. Faced with two young white men after a time with Eddie she finds it a strain to make sense to them, and perceives 'the almost forgotten patterns of interaction with my own kind' trivial and guarded:

> I liked, still like, the person who emerged from that process far better than the one who existed before it — or since it. In my own eyes I was becoming sane, normal, healthy, yet to anyone else's I must have appeared if not certifiably mad then at least irretrievably eccentric, sun-struck and bush-happy (pp.185-186).

The arrival in Warburton signifies the end of five months of her journey, and she feels good about it in spite of nothing having gone according to plan:

> So much of the trip had been wrong and empty and small, and so much of my life previous to it had been boring and predictable, that now when happiness welled up inside me it was as if I were flying through warm blue air (p.191).

Davidson attempts to explain that which she has only become conscious of in retrospect, the changes in her thinking during the months of trudging twenty miles a day:

> I had dredged up things that I had no idea existed. People, faces, names, places, feelings, bits of knowledge, all waiting for inspection. It was a giant cleansing of all the garbage and muck that had accumulated in my brain, a gentle catharsis. And because of that, I suppose, I could now see much more clearly into my present relationships with people and with myself (p.192).

A kind of harmony develops between her sense of herself and of the land: 'The openness and emptiness which had at first threatened me were now a comfort which allowed my sense of freedom and joyful aimlessness to grow.' (p.194). The motions and patterns and connections of things become apparent to her:

> When this way of thinking became ordinary for me, I too became lost in the net and the boundaries of myself stretched out for ever (p.195).

Though changing to this view of reality had been a difficult struggle against the old conditioning, Davidson claims that in rejecting it she had courted madness:

> The person inside whom I had previously relied on for survival had, out here and in a different circumstance, become the enemy. This internal warring had almost sent me around the bend (p.196).

The reward of this transformation is an aboriginal-like rapport with the land. She sheds the burden of her clock, leaving it ticking on a tree-stump, and celebrates by dancing 'like a senile old derelict' in her torn and grubby state:

> I liked myself this way, it was such a relief to be free of disguises and prettiness

> and attractiveness. Above all that horrible, false, debilitating attractiveness that women hide behind (p.200).

She tells herself that she must remember this when she gets back, and not fall into the trap again, but knows that 'Back there, this would be just another disguise.' Davidson suspects that her present perceptions and attitudes will not travel well. They will seem phony, part of her 'adventuress's identity kit' (p.253).

Towards the end of the trip she has a few days of happy exultation in her achievement:

> I reviewed what I had learnt. I had discovered capabilities and strengths that I would not have imagined possible... I had rediscovered people in my past and come to terms with my feelings towards them. I had learnt what love was. That love wanted the best possible for those you cared for even if that excluded yourself. That before, I had wanted to possess people without loving them, and now I could love them and wish them the best without needing them. I had understood freedom and security. The need to rattle the foundations of habit. That to be free one needs constant and unrelenting vigilance over one's weaknesses... To be free is to learn, to test yourself constantly, to gamble. It is not safe (p.222).

In the usual pattern of abrupt reversals of mood, this heady sense of mastery is followed by a shock which unbalances her. Her dog Diggity dies from poison.

The arrival at the Indian Ocean is a source of ambivalent feeling:

> There was an unpronouncable joy and an aching sadness to it. It had all happened too suddenly. I didn't believe this was the end at all (p.251).

The mood was not so much anticlimatic 'as the overwhelming feeling that I had somehow misplaced the penultimate scene.'

As with other female quests in contemporary writing, it is the covering of the distance, and not the distance covered, which is truly important.

A week camping on the beach is the final high point of feeling 'free and untrammelled and light.' On her arrival in New York four days later, Davidson is 'shell-shocked, intimidated by the canyons of glass and cement, finding my new adventuress's identity kit ill-fitting and uncomfortable' (p.253). She suffers reporters' questions, while 'dreaming of a different kind of desert.'

In remembering the trip and trying to sort out fact from fiction Davidson says:

> ... there is one clear fact that emerges from the quagmire. The trip was easy... The two important things that I did learn were that you are as powerful and strong as you allow yourself to be, and that the most difficult part of any endeavour is taking the first step, making the first decision (p.254).

She ends Tracks with the comment that camel trips do not begin or end, they merely change form. In nurturing her independence and confidence, Davidson's camel trip extends the possibilities of her nature. Travelling by herself allows a definition of herself not mediated by the demands and expectations of her society. Withdrawal into a natural landscape facilitates this shedding of burdens.

In For Love Alone, Teresa's psychological journey has a continuity reinforced by the structural progress of the novel. Her 'perilous journey' is the expanding and maturing of her spirit, as Stead's intense focus on Teresa's inner life makes clear. There is a pattern of

physical movements which corresponds with significant moments in Teresa's consciousness.

Teresa's life is patterned by waves of giving up her own progress; and impulsive, desperate acts of escape. There are four main exercises of self-assertion, each a physical exit heralding a psychological refusal of something damaging to her spirit. The first movement is her escape from Sydney to Harper's Ferry. Although she returns, chastened, to her father's house and her job, the first glimmering of Teresa's self-determination has been established. Her overnight stay in a vacant lot near the school is another small test of her ability to move freely in the world. The second movement, Teresa's passage to London by ship, is the culmination of years of wilful detachment from her family and wilful attachment to Jonathan Crow as a goal and reward for her struggles. The last two movements, the country excursion to the deserted sawmill with Jonathan, and the trip to Oxford with Harry Girton, generate moments of critical self-awareness in which Teresa frees herself from the unhappiness of emotional possession and meditates upon her destiny as an individual.

For Love Alone is prefaced by 'Sea People', an epic-like introduction of '... the part of the world Teresa came from.' That this Australianness signifies more than narrative background or setting is suggested by the Homeric allusions of the final paragraph. With this introduction, Stead implicitly parallels the search for an Australian identity with Teresa's search for her identity, and suggests that there is no individual or cultural growth without freedom from the prejudices and myths of the past.

The reference to the habit of eating a stodgy Anglo-Saxon Christmas feast in the Australian midsummer is an acknowledgement of lingering cultural uncertainty. Such habits imply that the grafting on of European values offers security and identity to a race of immigrants. Stead suggests that there is a need to throw off the shackles of tradition in order to realize the potential richness of life in Australia: 'It is a fruitful island... a great Ithaca', visually barren but actually endowed with natural bounty of minerals, sunshine and space.

Teresa's struggle is a painful and difficult liberation of herself from the past, personal and social. That she is an Australian is, after this preface, of less importance than her status as a woman in modern times. The two sections of the novel, 'The Island Continent' and 'Port of Registry: London', accommodate a natural division in the narrative of departure and arrival. They may also signify something about the tie between Australia and Britain, but Teresa is not primarily an archetypical wanderer of the cultural schizophrenia tradition in Australian writing. There is little discussion of colonial insecurity or where home really is in the novel. Teresa is a young woman who craves an independence which she feels can only be practised with confidence by distancing herself from the circumstances of her upbringing. Her desire to travel to another country reflects this.

For Love Alone ought not to be read as a novel protesting about the particularly oppressive nature of Australian society for women. It does chronicle some of

the ways in which customs and regulations in this country have limited women's power over their lives, such as the Depression ruling that women who married forfeited their right to employment, and the middle-class pressure on women to marry, so palpable at the scene of Malfi's wedding. However, this background is not startlingly different in its effects on women from that of contemporary American or British novels of female quest, like Margaret Drabble's Jerusalem the Golden, Doris Lessing's Children of Violence series, and Margaret Atwood's Surfacing and Lady Oracle. In these novels, too, a woman changes her place of residence: city to wilderness, province to city, South Africa to England, metropolitan America to village Italy. The new place is no haven for female independence in itself (though, as discussed earlier in this chapter, wildernesses seem to be congenial places for women seeking personal integration), because no community in the world is free of the political and social structures which oppress women. However, in fiction of female quest, travel enables the woman to push out the boundaries of her life.

The stifling psychological pressure of Teresa's family life, with its despotic figurehead and rigidly sexist domestic organisation is chronicled in the opening chapter. In the following two chapters this widens out to the social pressure on women to marry conventionally. The young Teresa is confronted with a series of trapped women — her cousins Malfi and Anne, her sister Kitty, and Mrs. Percy who had been '... quite a modern woman in her day, a bit eccentric... she went in for Darwinism, free-thinking,

women's movement' (p.53). Talking of her own life and ambitions, Teresa perceives of Mrs. Percy that '... an intelligence and a soul lived restlessly behind the eyes' (p.52). Yet Mrs. Percy has become a timid religious obsessive who tries to dissuade Teresa from the riskiness of being different from other girls.

Teresa's ramble home along the harbourside cliffs on the evening of Malfi's wedding is the first long, solitary walk of many in the novel. Such walks are classic images of restlessness of the spirit in novels of female quest. This walk begins the chapter 'It Was High Tide at Nine-Thirty', which captures Teresa's sensual apprehension of life, and her urge to participate in rather than simply observe human passion and absorption in life. Watching the fishermen descending the cliff, she expresses a longing for escape:

> If she could only go to the bottom of the dike now, with the men, and spend the night with them, thigh deep in the sweet water, catching fish, saying nothing, looking out to sea!(p.62).

Stead uses the landscape of waterside to accentuate Teresa's sense of her life. The depressing rows of houses and dirty lanes of the foreshore suburbs, and the sense-assaulting noise and crush of the inner city contain and symbolize the society she finds so stifling, with its bonds of duty and poverty. The quiet harbour, with its fishermen and endless horizon is a romantic image of escape and the promise of the future. On her arrival home after the day of the wedding, Teresa's first impulse is to shed her clothes and swim in the bay: '... the ocean she

dreamed under her lids was a wide smooth expanse under the moon, a halcyon sea' (p.67). The waterside situation of the Hawkins house forms a dramatic backdrop for Teresa's imaginative life. The window of her bedroom, where all her fantasies and fears are entertained, has a view of the open sea; 'She envisioned it tonight, a water floor out to the horizon, with a passage strewn with moonrushes and barely breaking at the base of the cliffs' (pp.72-73). The open sea, with its romantic associations of freedom and its underwater mysteries, is an image of the alternative to the narrow straitened path of conventional female life. The boom of the ocean is the background to Teresa's meditations on her life and future.

Escape is the obvious solution. 'She ought to run away. The only reason she did not run away was that she had not the courage' (p.80). Not sufficiently scholarly to win the escape route of an academic bursary, Teresa's ambitions have been deflated by the treadmill of primary-school teaching. She is painfully conscious of her inexperience: 'Why, I have never been out of school, I have never learned anything and never will!' (p.82).

The first section of For Love Alone documents Teresa's gradual movement towards psychological independence of her family and the social mores it represents. She tests her freedom to act and move on her own behalf, and each small action loosens the bonds a little. Studying office skills at night, she is inspired by the instructor's talk of secretarial work overseas:

> ... his fatal words, Europe, Jena, Weimar, the Black Forest, stuck in her mind with old scenes accompanying them, as if she had already been there and seen them. She must see them, they were part of an old heritage. But how? (p.83)

Teresa worries away at the financial barrier to travel, and berates herself for her caution: 'She had never done a single brave thing in her life, defying the rules; just obeyed, gone to school, paid in her money' (p.85). She wills herself to succeed: 'Love, learning, bread — myself — all three, I will get' (p.87).

In imagining a Utopian 'village of youth' where love and knowledge could be pursued with spontaneity, Teresa instinctively links these three desires, with an embryonic realisation that for women the personal is political and economic. Traditional sex roles and attitudes are reinforced by female poverty and exclusion from the power of knowledge. Her innocence lies in her belief that if she has the will she needn't suffer as one of 'the bloodless rout of women.' What we see in For Love Alone is Teresa suffering for her conventional femaleness — her self-abnegation in loving Jonathan — and also for her unconventional insistence on personal freedom. She alienates herself from her family and endures the judgment of her behaviour as freakish in order to fulfil her plan of travelling to England.

Chapter twelve ends the first cycle in For Love Alone. Teresa breaks away from 'the iron circle of home and work' by taking a train into the country on a week day. Although a modest rebellion, 'This first train journey was only the first stride on a grand perilous journey' (p.137). It is Teresa's first experience of running away

from circumstances which cramp her, and of the exhilaration of opening herself up to new possibilities: 'She did not know where she was going; she was outward bound' (p.137). This sets the pattern for future escapes: the ship to England, the return to London alone after the crisis of her relationship with Jonathan, and the testing of her liberty which takes her to Oxford with Harry Girton.

Teresa's excitement and pride in her successful escape establishes a new confidence in herself. She realises that she is capable of acting on her own behalf, as well as of dreaming and longing. Travelling north, she makes plans to walk the sixty miles back to Sydney from Harper's Ferry:

> When she got back, the first flurry would have died down and she would get a room somewhere, where no-one would come to bother her; no-one would take any further interest in her and she could begin as a typist and save up to get her degree and go abroad (p.139).

That Teresa is still a fanciful idealist is indicated by her choice of Harper's Ferry as a destination — '... she imagined it as a lonely, dark dread, endlessly solitary, inhuman place and had heard that a murder had been committed near there' (p.139).

This is the first of Teresa's long, fatiguing walks, symbolic of her grim determination not to be dissuaded from her course. By presenting her as faintly ridiculous, Stead gently satirises Teresa's obsessive will to freedom. She sets out for the Ferry without hat or blanket, and has distorted perceptions of her surroundings in the delirium of fatigue: 'She asked herself once: "Why

am I doing all this?" but she knew that there was a reason' (p.166). Teresa calmly retraces her steps at nightfall, realising that it is too far and that she will not find her way in the dark. The place Harper's Ferry is less important than her quest to reach it, which is a test of her self-determination. She also makes the discovery that mental attitudes are barriers to freedom as well as circumstances. Though the return home is inevitable when her family becomes alarmed, she isn't crushed: 'She was in a curious mood, half-regretful but determined; all her previous life had disappeared' (p.168).

Walking home from a lecture, Jonathan asks Teresa about her plans to travel to Europe: 'What are you going over there for, exactly?' (p.189). Her immediate answer, 'I want to go to the Sorbonne', is exposed as a romantic focus of all her aspirations by the discussion which follows. Jonathan persists with his questions:

> "Then why are you going?" he insisted. "I know some of the girls are going for one reason or another and some of the men. Some of them are getting up a cruise on a thirty-foot boat and expect to end up in Portsmouth. If you stayed here, you'd have a home and a job. Isn't it running a risk?"
> "What do you mean by a risk?"
> "There's so much unemployment everywhere and Europe's in a mess. They'll never assimilate Soviet Russia. There'll be another European War, they'll have men to fight in two years," he said grumpily. "I don't blame them, I'd go myself. Book-worming isn't my idea of life."
> "I couldn't be happy if I didn't make a venture" (pp.190-191).

Teresa's desire to travel is closely identified with her 'secret life', the impulse towards a richer experience of life than her present world offers.

In response to Jonathan's superficial assertion that, unlike him, she is in touch with real things, Teresa cries 'If you think my life is real to me — it's only a passage.' Jonathan prompts, 'To?':

> "To our secret desires," she said huskily. "To Cytherea, perhaps," and "night passage, isn't it? To Cytherea, or whatever island — but I always think of coral atolls, submarine volcanoes, the pearl gulfs of the north, a kind of Darwin's voyage of discovery, as the voyage to Cytherea. I do not think of their old islands", and she waved a careless hand towards the citadel of culture which the trees hid (pp.192-193).

Teresa's need '... to leave the lonely state that galled and humiliated her as a woman and freeman' becomes increasingly fixed to the idea of escape by sea:

> She loved the sea with a first and last love, had no fear of it, would have liked to sail it for two years without seeing land; she had the heart of a sailor. How could she be satisfied on the dull shore? (p.224).

During her regime of walking, one of Teresa's rest points is the Central Railway Station, near the ticket-window where she had bought the ticket to Narara:

> She would look at the window dimly, begin to fix it and sometimes think of it. Then she would rejoice austerely, thinking, I did the right thing — that led me to this and her present condition seemed to her a triumph in life, because she had really a man who wrote to her every week (p.261).

The idea of Jonathan comforts her in her alienation from society, and his absence in England serves as a concrete goal in her largely diffuse sense of quest. She refers to this wider aim in her characteristic language of journeying:

> She would sail the seas, leave her invisible track on countries, learn in great universities, know what was said by foreign tongues, starve in cities, tramp, perhaps shoeless,

> along side roads, perhaps suffer every misery, but she would know life (p.265).

In her weary self-deprivation, Teresa is momentarily tempted to follow Kitty's course and become housekeeper to a man to get a home:

> But her destiny was cast in bronze. By the time she reached the Quay, she knew she could not go and wash dishes hopelessly for some man, waiting for the day when he asked her to marry him. Better the rough and rolling sea than this convent with one nun (p.275).

Like the traveller Odysseus, Teresa must resist the deceptive promise of a life of ease and comfort. Even the harmless Erskine's love is perceived by her as Siren-like, '... a trap that is being set for me, to try to stop me from going abroad' (p.286).

The second section of For Love Alone begins with Teresa's arrival in England, though, in contradiction to her professed passion for travel, she insists that 'It was nothing to her that she was in England. She had never wanted to see England. It was Johnny she was seeing' (p.295). Teresa's growing misgivings about the future of her relationship with him are suggested by her reserve plan of study in France:

> When she made enough money there she would go to the Sorbonne as she had planned, and Johnny must make up his mind about her and women. This was a freak of her nature. Disappointed by Johnny, she instantly sought another country. She turned her back on failure (p.330).

At this time, Teresa's sense of her own progress, the unfolding of her life and possibilities, is that of a voyage through suffering and confusion to 'a love without troubles'

(p.321). However, it is the knowledge and courage she develops through wasted suffering for Jonathan which gives her the determination to find her destiny in things other than romantic love.

The aspiration to travel somewhere new is always Teresa's response to a sense of limitation. Such travel is symbolic of her unexplored, silently tended secret life, which is independent of the fortunes of the present moment. In her bitterness about Jonathan's declaration of the absence of love, she does not attend to this submerged impulse towards independent selfhood. She recriminates herself for 'the rigmarole of her buffoon Odyssey' as though without Jonathan her escape, and in fact her entire adult life up till now, has been a wasted effort.

Projecting his own frustration and cowardice onto Teresa, Jonathan tells her,

> "You're helpless, but you don't see it. So you go on putting yourself at the mercy of one person after another. It all comes from your inability to move freely. You're pinned down. If you don't like your job you must stick to it ——"
>
> "But I do like it ——"
>
> "If you don't like London you must live here, if you don't like me, you must stick to me ——"
>
> "I've changed jobs and countries" (p.378).

Teresa's retorts indicate her dawning sense of her power to alter the conditions of her life. She acknowledges this personal power in the scene of her break with Jonathan, in Chapter Thirty-three, choosing to opt out of the cycle of destruction.

Significantly, Teresa is disturbed by elements of her fanatic love in James Quick's passion:

> "Nothing can keep us apart. I will follow you all over the earth." She started away from him: "Like Johnny?" the idea came (p.452).

At first it seems as though Quick could easily become an obstacle rather than a bridge to fulfilment. He wants 'to make her over entirely' by opening up the world to her, including a University education. Teresa is ambivalent. 'She wanted to go to the Sorbonne — but to be a backstreet wife, to give with one hand and take with the other — not that!' (p.454). She does, however, resolve her conflict of interest, '... too formed by adversity and too firm and ambitious by nature to take pleasure in her marital union alone' (p.458). Her unrest remains part of her secret life, which she cannot visit upon Quick. The marriage does offer an opening out of experience for her:

> She was like a cornered animal before which, miraculously, an escape through rich quiet flowering country is opened; she fled away down the flowering lanes of Quick's life, and had not yet stopped to reconnoitre or to see and admire the plain (p.460).

However, her questing nature is only temporarily in harbour:

> She had felt in her heart for some time, emptied of the old need and ambition, an unemployment and dryness which startled her. It was her secret. "This is not right, life is love," she said to herself. She thought <u>this</u> might be marriage, and if so, marriage itself was arid, for this end of all striving and even lusting in love was wrong and not the part of any mature, joyful, human being. It was no good striving for mere tranquillity and the death of the heart (p.467).

Her restlessness leads her into an affair with Girton. His fierce wanderlust strikes a chord in her:

> ... they were stormy petrels, each looking for adventure not only in physical danger

> but in moral and heady regions, what could they do with this simple love that depended on and gave tranquillity? (p.489).

Teresa is finally aware of her independent destiny:

> And suddenly as a strange thought it came to her, that she had reached the gates of the world of Girton and Quick and that it was towards them she was only now journeying, and in a direction unguessed by them; and it was towards them and in this undreamed direction that she had been travelling all her life, and would travel, farther, without them... (p.494).

The reconciliation with Quick does not ease her confusion:

> But she did not know where she stood, any more than if a high tide had washed in and swamped the road where she used to walk. What relation had she to Quick, to Girton, to the men who surrounded her, to all men? What was her fate? (p.495).

The novel ends with Teresa uncertain of the consequences of her connection with Quick, and poised for another exit.

Although Stead's novel is a sombre document of wasted suffering in the lives of women, Teresa's story ends in a mood of quiet strength. No longer feeling that she must repress or doubt herself, Teresa enjoys a new trust in her perceptions of the world. Her chance confrontation with Jonathan feels strange and other-worldly, and she '... can't believe I ever loved that man.' Though she is perhaps justified in claiming that the pattern of female capitulation and suffering will go on being repeated, works like For Love Alone suggest the capacity of courageous women to learn from their experience.

The quotation from Olive Schreiner by which The Aunt's Story is introduced immediately alerts the reader to Theodora's status as a metaphysical traveller:

> She thought of the narrowness of the limits within which a human soul may speak and be understood by its nearest of mental kin, of how soon it reaches that solitary land of the individual experience, in which no fellow footfall is ever heard (Preface).

Old Mrs. Goodman has died at last, and her middle-aged spinster daughter Theodora is on the threshold of the rest of her life. Her sense of release from the dominating personality of her mother is qualified by the air of unreality about the present, and uncertainty about the future:

> The blood began to flow. I am free now, said Theodora Goodman. She had said this many times since the moment she had suspected her mother's silence and realized that old Mrs. Goodman had died in her sleep. If she left the prospect of freedom unexplored, it was less from a sense of remorse than from not knowing what to do. It was a state that she had never learned to enjoy (pp.11-12).

The Aunt's Story unravels Theodora's life, bringing into focus crucial incidents and influences in her childhood and adulthood so as to explain how she has become so alienated from herself and her needs as to be 'This thing a spinster' which 'came when the voice called.' Though the three sections of the novel indicate changes of place and time, they are given continuity by Theodora's extended vogage into the emotions of the past. Theodora's quest is the psychological process by which she exorcises the long-repressed demons of hate and fear and learns the freedom which is to be at peace with her own nature. Unfortunately, for Theodora to live according to her nature is to be mad in the world's eyes. The ending of The Aunt's Story is discussed in my analysis of Theodora's madness in Chapter Three.

As with other novels of female quest, the unfolding of Theodora's personality and her discovery and exercise of her powers of perception is symbolised by travel in foreign lands. The foreigness conveys the mystery of the unknown, unconscious elements of the mind. This is why the European and American locations in The Aunt's Story evoke moods rather than bring to mind places. They are not described specifically, and seem incidental to the story. They are not even real to Theodora:

> Theodora looked at her labels, at all those places to which apparently she had been. In all those places, she realized, people were behaving still, opening umbrellas, switching off the light, singing Wagner, kissing, looking out of open windows for something they had not yet discovered, buying a ticket for the metro, eating salted almonds and feeling a thirst. But now that she sat in the hall of the Hôtel du Midi and waited, none of those acts was what one would call relevant (p.135).

She doesn't want to see Europe any more than Teresa Hawkins had wanted to see England:

> 'And what are your plans, Theo?' asked Frank.
> 'I shall probably go away.'
> 'Good heavens,' said Fanny, 'where?'
> Freedom was still a blunt weapon. Theodora did not answer, because she did not know.
> 'Anywhere. Or everywhere,' she said at last. 'Except that the world is large' (p.17).

At the time of her mother's funeral, Theodora has a kind of hollow strength which barely withstands the pressure of other people's influence. Like the child Lou, 'The shape of her own life had not been fixed' (p.16). She is unsure of her identity, eroded by the habit of duty to her mother:

> Her own name spilt stiff and hollow out of the dusty horn of an old phonograph, into

> the breathless house. So that her mouth trembled, and her hand, rigid as protesting wood, on the coffin's yellow lid (p.11).

Even the necessity of exercising her will in the disposal of her future is draining:

> Strength had at last made her weak. And now, for a moment also, she touched with the ball of the handkerchief the humiliating fringe of her moustache. Perhaps, after all, she would remain the victim of family approval and her upper lip (pp.17-18).

The first section, 'Meroë', is ostensibly the story of the family property where Theodora grew up, which she is in the habit of repeating for her niece's pleasure. White transforms this ritual into a rich and subtle evocation of all of Theodora's life up to the time of her mother's death. That the current reminiscence is charged with new significance for Theodora is suggested by her sense of strain: 'Now that they approached the hour of the funeral, Theodora was exhausted, as if she had carried more than the burden of the dead' (p.131). She has lapsed into the mental process of self-discovery involuntarily, and is compelled to continue on in to 'the solitary land of the individual experience.':

> And already the moment, the moments, the disappearing afternoon, had increased the distance that separates. There is no life-line to other lives. I shall go, said Theodora, I have already gone. The simplicity of what ultimately happens hollowed her out (p.132).

The first third of the novel, 'Meroë', describes the ways in which she has searched for a fit between herself and the world to which she belongs. Theodora has always found the natural world more congenial than people.

Her passion for the bare hills around Meroë is intense, the first of several psychic links with landscape in the novel. When her father tells her that there is another Meroë, a dead place in the black country of Ethiopia, this expansion of the child's known world is at first frightening to her. 'Abyssinia' comes to have a meaning for Theodora of something like the soul's wholeness before 'the great fragmentation of maturity.' At the end of 'Jardin Exotique' she says 'I may even return to Abyssinia', and tells Fanny in a letter from America, 'I am writing to say that I have seen and done, and the time has come at last to return to Abyssinia' (p.256). It is like the Ithaca of Ulysses, an idealised home of the spirit from which she has strayed.

Theodora is consistently described in her affinity with the natural world, and her problematic relation with the human world:

> She felt on her cheek the smooth flesh of roses. This was smoother than faces. And more compelling. The roses drowsed and drifted under her skin (p.21).

Her father, with whom she goes shooting, shares this harmonious integration with the landscape:

> Father did not speak. He respected silence, and besides, whether it was summer or winter, the landscape was more communicative than people talking. It was close, as close as your own thought... (p.32).

As Theodora grows up, there is less solace to be had in nature. The perplexities of adolescence impinge upon her more than Fanny, because her individuality is more at odds with conventional femaleness. Theodora tries 'to learn the

rules of the games that she must play' to be a young lady, but fails. Unable to establish intimacy or gain understanding of herself from her mother, Fanny or her friend Violet, she finds that some men can offer her acceptance and a widening of her experience. Her father, the Syrian hawker and the Man who was Given his Dinner are the forerunners of Moraïtis and General Solkolnikov. Holstius is an internalised consolidation of these sympathetic male figures.

Theodora's adult self-alienation is the consequence of her alienation from most of the people she comes into contact with. This process is expressed by the metaphorical language of destruction. The force of Mrs. Goodman's personality is associated with brightness and hardness, with flashing rings and knives, and the lightning which once struck Theodora down as a child:

> It was terrible, the strength of mother. All your own weakness came flowing back. Mother was more terrible than lightning that had struck the tree (p.42).

The child Theodora is able to accept her mother's destructiveness in the same spirit that she cannot condemn the grub in the heart of the rose — 'She could not subtract it from the sum total of the garden.' However, as her conscious life develops, she becomes more painfully aware of 'the distance that separates' and the contempt of other people:

> I shall never overcome the distances, felt Theodora. And because she was like this, she found consolation in the deal mirror in the room for four. When she was alone she spoke to the face that had now begun to form, its bone... Because it

> was the face to which nothing had yet happened, it could not take its final shape. It was a vessel waiting for experience to fill it, and then the face would finally show (p.51).

Mirrors, reflections, water, light and glass are consistently associated with Theodora, suggesting her perspicacity and uncommon capacity for moments of insight. One of these is her understanding of her essential solitariness:

> It was less melancholy than inevitable. She did not love Violet less. They could still walk linked through the long grass at dusk, and hate the intruder, but Theodora knew she would also prefer sometimes to risk the darkness and walk alone (p.56).

Theodora sometimes finds her asceticism of the spirit intolerable. She identifies herself with the desolation of Meroë's hills:

> There are certain landscapes in which you can see the bones of the earth. And this was one. You could touch your own bones, which is to come a little closer to truth. After the secrets and quotations, the whispers in the orchard at Spofforths'. Now the ghost of Violet Adams had begun to be expelled. She could not endure the bones and stones. Though Theodora bowed her head. It is still possible to love the ghost that has been exorcised. There remains the need (p.60).

Perversely, Theodora acts in ways which feed this sense of isolation, even attempting to destroy her sympathetic relationship with the natural world. Out hunting with Frank Parrott, who is drawn to her partly for her oddness, she deliberately shoots the little hawk with which she identifies herself. This is a symbolic rejection of even the possibility of his love, in an attempt to anaesthetise feeling: 'She felt exhausted, but there was no longer any pain. She was as negative as air' (p.71). This incident

is the forerunner of various acts of self-effacement by which Theodora tries to adjust to the world:

> After that Theodora often thought of the little hawk she had so deliberately shot. I was wrong, she said, but I shall continue to destroy myself, right down to the last of my several lives. (p.71).

The death of her father, who was embarked on a 'perpetual odyssey' of the spirit and so understood her own, signals the end of Theodora's childhood. Leaving Meroë with her mother, she feels thrown out upon the world, a wanderer like Ulysses:

> The straw from the packing cases still twitched at her skirt. The sea of pines swelled, hinting at some odyssey from which there was no return (p.89).

Theodora enters 'a stretch of years in which she chose flatness', knowingly submitting herself to the domination of her mother's will. Huntly Clarkson, a more sophisticated version of Frank, offers Theodora an escape in marriage which she refuses to take. Her rejection of this compromise is intimated most strongly by her blasting away at clay ducks in a show booth, ominously recalling the incident of the hawk. Both seem attempts at punishing herself for the arrogance of her uncompromising self.

Theodora's response to the pain of acute perception is to repress and punish herself, closing the door on her emotional life. Her meeting with the Greek 'cellist Moraïtis, who also 'accepted the isolation', brings Theodora into a painful awareness of herself again:

> You were not untouched. There were moments of laceration, which made you dig your nails into your hands. The 'cello's voice was one long barely

> subjugated cry under the savage lashes
> of the violins (p.111).

Theodora's impulse to murder her mother is an attempt at salvation of herself, though she perceives her hatred as a 'core of evil' in herself and regrets her lack of 'humility'. She refers to the means by which:

> ...the great monster Self will be destroyed, and that desirable state achieved, which resembles, one would imagine, nothing more than air or water. She did not doubt that the years would contribute, rubbing and extracting, but never enough (p.128).

After her mother's death, Theodora goes away to pursue humility in 'the great fragmentation of maturity'.

The central section of the novel, 'Jardin Exotique', is a bizarre mixture of reality and fantasy, expressing Theodora's psychological voyage into the complexities of her own nature and that of other individuals in an effort to come to terms with being who she is. The characters of this section form a human pageant of what Theodora calls her several lives. She becomes General Solkolnikov's sister Ludmilla, and he her benign but ineffectual father; Katina Pavlou represents her innocent and endangered younger self; Mrs. Rapallo, with her figment of a daughter, suggests the emotionally rapacious Mrs. Goodman; Lieselotte and Wetherby are redolent of Theodora's ill-matched parents. The narrow, ingratiating lives of the Demoiselles Bloch suggest a shape Theodora might otherwise have assumed.

Theodora's launching of herself in an unknown environment is both an exorcism of the past, and a new attempt to live as a social being. On her arrival at the hotel, 'Even though she had not yet seen them, Theodora could

feel that the hotel was full of people, and she waited to touch their hands' (p.141). The touching of hands suggests the promise of understanding and intimacy; and the exoticism of the 'jardin', the potential of her soul to 'foresake its queer opaque manner of life and come out into the open' (p.140). Theodora is hesitant about the possibility of acceptance, having become used to the status of the outsider:

> 'And you have arrived by the morning train.' She began to feel this without the telling. But it was something she had suspected all her life. Now she knew. She walked with her hat in her hands, the big straw with the unfortunate sallow ribbons, she walked to where her mother sat, saying in her small horn, interminable voice: Here is Theodora, we were discussing whether, but of course Theodora would not know, Theodora has just arrived.
> 'It is often a virtue,' the General said quickly (p.153).

She has the sensation that 'the doors had begun to be thrown open, from some distance, you could hear, many doors' (p.154) and that, in the 'jardin', 'time continued to disintegrate into a painful, personal music, of which the themes were intertwined. So that it was not possible to withdraw into a comfortable isolation' (pp.165-166).

Theodora is forced to receive the confidence of her fellow guests, and to witness the jealousies and passions which move them. As the General admonishes her, 'You must realize, Ludmilla, that you cannot close doors' (p.235). Her resulting confusion is somehow more illuminating than the certain knowledge she had craved as a child:

> She could not explain. She could explain nothing, least of all her several lives. She could not explain that where there is

> more than one it is inevitable always to betray (p.213).

The hotel fire which ends 'Jardin Exotique' recalls earlier moments of fire and burning, which have been expressive of passion and suffering, and Theodora's fear of being consumed by these things. However, this fire seems a creative experience for Theodora, a grand ritual exorcism of her past:

> All the violence of fire was contained in the hotel. It tossed whether hatefully or joyfully, it tossed restraint to smoke. Theodora ran, breathing the joy or hatred of fire (p.247).

The only possession she cares to save is her mother's garnet ring, 'rather an ugly little ring, but part of the flesh.' This suggests Theodora's new understanding that the past is not to be feared, that it is a part of herself. She can forgive and accept the suffering inflicted upon her by her mother, and her own destructive hatred as well.

'Holstius', the third section of The Aunt's Story, takes Theodora to the mid-west of America. It seems that her attempt to fit into the world has been abandoned: '... in spite of outer appearances, Theodora Goodman suggested that she had retreated into her own distance and did not intend to come out' (p.255). Theodora is ultimately unable to find her contentment in pretending to live and be like other people:

> ... there was ultimately no safeguard against the violence of personality. This was less controllable than fire. In the bland corn song, in the theme of days, Theodora Goodman was a discord. Those mouths which attempted her black note rejected it wryly (p.260).

Her behaviour is quite consistent with this knowledge,

though to observers it seems evidence of madness. She steps off a train at a siding and walks, discarding personal objects from her handbag, 'that last link with the external Theodora Goodman' (p.263). When she is taken in by the Johnsons, she gives a false name:

> Theodora could have cried for her own behaviour, which had sprung out of some depth she could not fathom. But now her name was torn out by the roots, just as she had torn the tickets, rail and steamship, on the mountain road. This way perhaps she came a little closer to humility, to anonymity, to pureness of being (p.269).

Theodora only tries to cope with the complexity of her own nature by effacing it.

It is only when she confronts Holstius that Theodora recognizes this conflict for what it is. He is a composite of all the empathetic men she has been drawn towards in the past, and also the morally supportive voice of her deepest self:

> 'Ah, Theodora Goodman, you are torn in two.'
> 'What is it,' she asked in agony, 'you expect me to do or say?'
> 'I expect you to accept the two irreconcilable halves. Come,' he said, holding out his hand with the unperturbed veins. She huddled on the boards, beyond hope of protection by convention or personality, but the cloth on the legs of Holstius had the familiar texture of childhood, and smelled of horses, and leather, and guns. She rested her head against his knees (pp.277-278).

Theodora's calmness lies in her acceptance that 'true permanence is a state of multiplication and division' and that her life is a part of all the lives she has entered into imaginatively. Her self is not a monster to be destroyed, but a creative and valuable intelligence. However, the voice of Holstius recommends that she submit herself to

the ministrations of people who 'prescribe the reasonable life.' The ending of the novel seems weak and unconvincing in its equation of madness and inner freedom.[16]

Each of the texts discussed links the questing female character's journey of spiritual discovery with physical travel of some kind. The dissatisfactions which precede the woman's movement to another country, into a natural landscape, or merely on a solitary walk, generally have to do with relationships within her family. In each case there is a dominant attachment to the father, with emotional extensions of the father-daughter bond in a choice of lovers or mentors. Chapter Two explores the role of the male character in these female quests.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ROLE OF THE MALE CHARACTER

In each of the quests discussed, the author's exploration of the female character's consciousness involves the establishment of one or more male characters as threats to, or tests of, the security of her personality. The male figure may be a father, a lover, or a hybrid figure combining aspects of both. The woman may enter a series of love relationships which are emotional variations of a contorted or truncated bond with her father.

The focus of the novel is the woman's personal integrity rather than her relationship with a particular man. The men are not usually of great interest in themselves, but serve as points of self-definition for the central female character, and represent masculine power as an obstacle to female autonomy. For young women at the beginnings of their quests in particular, the male character poses a threat of possible dependence, emotional and intellectual; and possession, sexual and legal.

In their relationships with men, the female protagonists of Tracks and The Aunt's Story have stronger senses of self than the questing women in the other three novels. The men whom Theodora Goodman and Robyn Davidson encounter in their quests do not seriously hinder their progress. These men are not so much threats as timely tests of their convictions about personal freedom and integrity.

After a period of fear and despondency, Davidson

revolts against Kurt Posel's authoritarianism, and thereafter refuses to have her confidence undermined by the things men do or say about her. Theodora instinctively sabotages the romantic progress of her relationships with Frank Parrott and Huntly Clarkson, in spite of the social status and independence from family these marriages would offer her. She cannot risk the possibility that conventional life as a married woman would preclude her quest for understanding of herself.

Jonathan Crow in For Love Alone, Felix Shaw in The Watch Tower, and Colin Porteous in Tirra Lirra by the River, are truly threatening males who excel at emotional manipulation of female youth, loneliness or pity. Teresa, Clare, and Nora have to realise the oppressiveness of their relationships with these men before they can be free of them.

The characterisation of the female protagonist in these three novels is achieved by depicting her isolated self-awareness, and complementing this by suggesting what she does not know about herself and her oppressors. Ironic, but generally sympathetic undercutting of her language and behaviour is a common means. Early in For Love Alone, Stead makes Teresa's romantic idealism faintly ridiculous by having her inappropriately self-dramatise at the family lunch table (p.13). Teresa's naïve vulnerability to Jonathan Crow is handled with heavier dramatic irony. Lacking experience of men and the world, she doesn't see that he is toying with her in the same way that we are shown him toying

with his audience of university women, with waitresses in tea-shops, and with the maid Lucy.

In Tirra Lirra by the River, Anderson exploits the ironic distance between an old woman's wisdom and the naïvety of her younger self. Reviewing the mistakes of her youth, Nora's story reveals that in identifying the emotional security of her early childhood with her dead father, she had married a man who kept her in a state of childish dependence. Harrower in The Watch Tower, establishes the innocence of the Vaizey sisters in order to dramatise their manipulation by the more worldly characters of their mother and Felix. It is because she has no experience of love that Laura is so easily steered into marriage plans about which she '... supposed she must be terrifically happy' (p.40). Clare is similarly blind to the emotional obligations of Felix's material support: 'Clare looked about the pretty room that would be hers if Laura chose for some bizarre reason to belong to Felix Shaw' (p.39).

In these novels of female quest, a real or symbolic break with the father or possessive lover is the crisis of self-discovery for the woman, in which she acknowledges the psychological slavery of the acceptance of male authority. She must negotiate her way around this obstacle in her quest for her integrity. Subsequently, alternative ways of living become apparent to her.

This pattern may be seen as the female equivalent of the trials of the hero in mythology and literature. Instead of killing a dragon or outwitting a sorcerer, the

contemporary heroic female character must contest the power of a man who is emotionally significant to her. The false guides and false roads hindering her progress are the voices and ways of conventional female life. That self-abnegation in love is wrongly seen as female adjustment and evidence of a woman's maturity is suggested by persistent conflicts about dependence and independence in women's literature, and the fact that so many heroines love so unwisely and at such personal cost.

In her article 'The Female Faust', Ann Ronald refers to a particular mythic pattern in women's literature of a female protagonist, or 'Faustess', ready and willing to make a private bargain with her own kind of devil:

> Unlike her masculine counterparts, she possesses no special knowledge, holds no special position. She generally is sensitive, usually intelligent, often innocent... she appears in so many guises that it becomes impossible to pinpoint her characteristics other than to say she is a woman living in a man's world, a feminine protagonist ensconced in a masculine milieu. And specifically, that masculine milieu is personified by some kind of Mephistophelian figure with whom she can strike a bargain. He may be father, brother, son, lover, husband, or foe, but he consistently occupies a position close enough to hers so that their relationship can lead to some kind of contractual agreement, whether explicit or implicit.[1]

Ronald explains that:

> A Faustess expects her agreement to be a fortunate one wherein she gains marriage (or at least love), children (perhaps), peace, contentment, fulfilment, but most of all, security. In return she gives up only her individuality.[2]

The employment of the Faust myth in distinctly female terms is a useful approach to female characters

who give up part or all of themselves while hoping to find some magical reward for their acquiescence:

> During the last two decades, increasing numbers of women have shown that the end result of the Faustian bargain is not a reward but a punishment — not heaven, not even purgatory, but hell or madness or a combination of the two. Hoping to find peace, security, and love, the contemporary Faustess finds instead only despair.[3]

Ronald refers to imagery of male devilry in nineteenth and twentieth century writing by women: Charlotte Brontë's Mr. Rochester, Emily Brontë's Heathcliff , James in Margaret Drabble's The Waterfall, and the 'Daddy' Sylvia Plath tries to purge from her mind in the poem of that name. Two of the novels discussed in this thesis continue the tradition of the Mephistophelian male in women's fiction. In For Love Alone, Jonathan Crow is depicted as a diabolical man. He is dark-visaged, tormented, repeatedly described in predatory images and once, explicitly, as 'satanic' (p.448). In The Watch Tower, Felix's violence and misogyny is given extra charge through imagery associated with a china figurine of the legendary ogre Bluebeard (p.46).

Modern Australian fiction has a number of female Fausts who surrender themselves to a corrupt man in the need for love and security, and discover later that they have made a serious mistake. Apart from Laura in The Watch Tower, the pattern may be seen in Harrower's earlier novel The Catherine Wheel (1960) and Kylie Tennant's Time Enough Later (1945). In Clemency James's confusing and damaging emotional involvement with the

attractive, self-absorbed wastrel Christian Roland, Harrower suggests the dangers of female innocence. Tennant's novel gives a similar sense of the cost of enlightenment for Bessie Drew, who depletes her youthful energies in the service of the egoistic Maurice Wainwright. The bargain and dénouement vary from work to work, but the basic pattern is that outlined by Ronald.

However, there is a digression from the essential Faust myth in the use of the pattern in women's literature. Sometimes the female protagonist averts unhappiness by fleeing her bargain rather than enduring it. Her story does not end in pathos, but in power, with a resolution of conflict in putting the needs of the self before those of the man. This is the case with Clare in The Watch Tower, and Teresa in For Love Alone.

In an article titled 'Our Fathers Daughters: the problem of filiation for women writers of fiction', Kay Iseman discusses the common psychological processes which women face in the struggle for autonomy within a male-defined society.[4] The psychological complexity of early family relationships, and the dynamics of separation from the mother, transference of affection to the father, and the establishment of independence, are seen as common themes in modern women's fiction. Iseman is particularly interested in the prevalence of a dominant attachment to the father.

In each of the quests discussed in this thesis, the father-daughter bond forged in early family life continues to exert an influence over the feelings and behaviour of the protagonist. Theodora Goodman picks up the threads of

her father's unfinished spiritual odyssey after his death, and seeks a series of replacements for him in male mentors like Moraïtis and General Solkolnikov.

Teresa Hawkins's relationship with Jonathan has elements of her ambivalent feeling towards her father. Both men test their power over her by goading her in arguments, and teasing her over sexual matters, and neither allows her a feeling of security in his affection for her. Laura and Clare Vaizey are thrown upon an indifferent mother and frightening new life by the death of their father, who seems to have provided emotional anchorage in spite of being 'not very practical' (p.3). Their susceptibility to Felix Shaw's deceptive offer of financial protection may be understood as a consequence of their identification of older men with security.

Robyn Davidson's narrative suggests that her trip is in part a need to enact those characteristics of her father's which she admires and sees in herself in embryonic form. At the same time, she has the urge to free herself from the perplexing bonds of filial love (pp.108-109).

Iseman's recognition that the struggle for female autonomy is often played out against the backdrop of emotional dependence on the primary father figure, is most useful in an analysis of Tirra Lirra by the River. Iseman's discussion of Sylvia Plath is just as appropriate as a summation of Nora's life:

> Her personality and creative life read as a quest to rediscover the lost security of the early bond.[5]

Like Plath, Nora unconsciously punishes herself for the

death of her father when she was a young child. Her passivity in the face of male brutality suggests an acceptance of blame. Nora's belated efforts to forgive herself and become secure in herself, have their reward in the recovery of a repressed memory of her loved, dead father.

It is apparent that the love of men is not necessarily a threat to the questing character. In For Love Alone, passionate love is for Teresa the symbol of all the riches of life she wants to experience. The discovery of its mutuality with James Quick enables her to recover her sense of independent existence after sacrificing it to Jonathan Crow. Her love affair with Harry Girton is an affirmation of her recovery of sanity and emotional responsiveness.

In The Watch Tower, Clare draws strength and courage from her affection for Bernard, though she is understandably wary of any romantic expectations of their friendship.

Theodora Goodman's unspoken affinities with men like her father, The Man who was Given his Dinner, Moraïtis, and General Solkolnikov, help her to endure the gaping distances in other relationships. They balance the failures and confusions of her more socially conventional dealings with Frank Parrott and Huntly Clarkson. Though these two suitors are quite gentle and unassuming men, Theodora's integrity of personality does not admit of such compromises as even a good marriage would require of her. Theodora's dismissal of Frank and Huntly from

her life before they have impinged upon it suggests both her perspicacity and her stoicism. The Aunt's Story is not discussed in detail in this chapter, since Theodora's relationship with her mother is more destructive and troubling to her than any of the men who enter her life.

Tracks has a rewarding male character who appears after Davidson has successfully confronted Kurt Posel, and hardened herself to the male chauvinism in Alice Springs. The author's ambivalence towards Rick Smolan may be seen within the pattern of conflict about men in female quest literature. At first he seems an irritation, and an obstacle in her path, but because of her growing faith in herself, she is able to allow her affection for him to deepen.

In both Tracks and For Love Alone, the protagonist has the chance to exercise her new self in a subsequent relationship with a man. The new lover proves to be a potent source of pleasure and intimacy. These men are the rewards for successful completion of the quest, in much the same way as a woman's love traditionally rewards the male hero.

The romantic storyline suggested by the title of Christina Stead's novel For Love Alone may seem misleading, implying a conventional tale of unrequited love for Mr. Wrong and salvation by Mr. Right. Yet the romantic plot is in some ways misleading. The novel is a woman's odyssey, or quest for liberation, expressed through her aspirations towards an ideal of love. The search for

love is a focussing of all her needs for fulfilment; emotional, intellectual and sexual.

In this sense Teresa's obsession about love is to her credit, indicating the generosity and passion of her nature. At intervals throughout the novel Teresa asserts her broad definition of love as a source of energy and knowledge, against the conventional attitudes of others.

Yet the novel's title indicates its bitter statement on the role in which women have traditionally cast themselves: to find satisfaction in the service of those they love. Teresa joins the long line of spirited female characters in fiction who love men for what the women can do for them: take care of them, affirm their importance, facilitate their work. Isabel Archer and Dorothea Brooke are well-used examples of this pattern in nineteenth century literature. The young Martha Quest in Doris Lessing's The Four-Gated City, Bessie in Kylie Tennant's Time Enough Later, and Clemency in Elizabeth Harrower's The Catherine Wheel are more recent instances. In each case, loss of self and dignity is the price to be paid.

In For Love Alone Teresa typifies female masochism when she claims that, 'To love is to give forever, without stint, and not to ask for the slightest thing' (p.279). She casts herself in this perversely heroic role of patient, suffering lover. Teresa's behaviour is not merely a female version of courtly love, a male romantic pose adopted for the purposes of courtship. It reflects a deeply-rooted sense of inferiority. Teresa's self-

subjugation limits and damages her until finally the psychological barrier to freedom is fought through, and she finds in love not an ending, but a beginning of the possibilities in her life.

When the story opens, Teresa is nineteen, a teacher of retarded children in Sydney of the early 1930's. The social and emotional poverty of her background is seen through her struggles against its limitations. The Hawkins family is imprisoned together by bonds of duty and poverty, and Teresa's life at the school is depressing and frustrating. She can neither help nor protect her pupils, and is subject herself to the tyranny of school regulations and officials. At home she and her sister Kitty are dominated by their father and brothers, who form a cruelly teasing male chorus to the women's lives.

The first chapter opens with a description of Andrew Hawkins in terms of his maleness rather than his parental role:

> Naked, except for a white towel rolled into a loincloth, he stood in the doorway, laughing and shouting, a tall man with powerful chest and thick hair of pale burning gold and a skin still pale under many summers' tan. He seemed to thrust back the walls with his muscular arms; thick tufts of red hair stood out from his armpits (p.5).

This is significant, for Teresa relates sexually to him, and he oppresses her with his masculine power, a role later to be usurped by Jonathan Crow. Susan Higgins recognises this emotional extension of the father-daughter relationship in Jonathan's fascination for Teresa:

> ...[Andrew Hawkins] is established in this scene as a potent figure representing a complex of things: he is the male who attracts her but humiliates her with his power; he is the father whom she is about to discard and seek in another man (in his narcissism and the passivity towards women's love revealed by his stories, he prefigures Jonathan); and he is the voice of patriarchal authority...[6]

Andrew Hawkins is a psychological tyrant who plays on his daughters' insecurities:

> "Ah, you think you know a lot about love," went on Andrew, coming into the room, and throwing himself full length on the old settee underneath the window that looked upon the beach. "Yes, Trees is always moaning about love, but you don't know, Trees, that love is warmth, heat. The sun is love and love also is fleshly, in this best sense that a beautiful woman gladdens the heart of man and a handsome man brightens the eyes of the ladies. One blessed circle, perpetual motion." He laughed. "Many women have loved your Andrew, but not you two frozen women." He continued teasing, waiting for an answer,
>
> "Orpheus with his lute made T'rees
> And the mountain tops that freeze,
> Bow themselves when he did sing."
>
> "We will never be finished," said Teresa. "And there are the beans to do, I must do them," said Kitty...
> "Beauty," mused Andrew, looking at them. "What a strange thing I didn't have lovely daughters, I who worship beauty so much!" (pp.7-8).

Andrew's attitudes to women reflect the contradictory demands made on women in the modern situation. They must make themselves attractive to men sexually — Andrew tells Teresa that '... it might be better if you knew how to lure men' (pp.11-12) — but must be pure and devoted: "What charm there is in a modest woman!' (p.10).

Teresa reacts against this sexually repressive male

teasing, but is made to seem ridiculous, increasing her vulnerability (p.13). She is similarly victimised by Jonathan's sardonic thrusts. While Andrew Hawkins applauds the deviousness of the female flirt who affects modesty as a bait, Jonathan sneers at what he sees as female attempts to charm:

> She supposed his timidity had overcome him again, so she took her hat without speaking and opening her bag, took out a little mirror to fix her hair. Jonathan took the mirror out of her hands, just touching her finger-tips, and turned it thoughtfully in his hand. "Do you think it's an instinct, I wonder — coquetry I mean. Do you dress for men or for yourselves?"
>
> "Köhler's apes in the Canaries put leaves and rags in their hair," said Teresa. She was trying not to cry (p.341).

Vulnerable and isolated, the young Teresa becomes obsessed with the need to have a man as a shield. On the ferry trip to her cousin Malfi's wedding, in Chapter Two, she lapses into an angry reverie about marriage and spinsterhood:

> As the burning sun bored into her and the reflections from the water dazzled her, she saw insistently, with the countless flaming eyes of her flesh, the inner life of these unfortunate women and girls, her acquaintance, a miserable mass writhing with desire and shame, grovelling before men, silent about the stew in which they boiled and bubbled, discontented, browbeaten, flouted, ridiculous and getting uglier each year (p.18).

The only means of escape seems to marry. The alternative is suggested by Gladys, the Bay's wild girl, who has a strong fascination for the sisters:

> Teresa, seeing the wild girl rush shouting down the streets with boys and go bathing with them in lonely parts of the

> harbour, hearing that she had the freedom of all the sheds and boats, had a pang of jealousy. Girls wanted to take the road, but how could they, how could they? She would have liked to ask Gladys certain things (p.21).

Through Malfi's wedding, Stead explores sexual values in Australian society. She captures the tension of the atmosphere, with the sordidness and fear underlying the humour. The tossing of the bride's bouquet is a masterly symbolic focus for the effects on women's minds of the social pressure to marry:

> What a scene! They had nearly all discarded their hats and posies and stood breathing upwards, their eyes darkly fixed, with pain, not pleasure, on the bouquet. As it left the bride's hand, involuntary cries burst from them, and they leapt at what was falling towards them, jumping sideways, knocking their neighbours out of the way, pushing, and if they fell back too soon they leapt again with open mouths and eyes and not a smile, their red, damp faces flushing deeper and taking on hungry, anguished and desperate expressions, as in the fatal superstitious moment they struggled for the omen of marriage (p.38).

It ends up at Teresa's feet:

> She had not jumped for the bouquet, though pushed forward by Aunt Bea with her sister Kitty, because in that blink of the eye she had seen the awful eagerness of the others and the smiling, waiting circle of adults, witnesses of their naked need; and so she had drawn back a bit, with a thumping heart, disappointed but grim, at the very moment the bouquet was thrown. She picked up her skirt now and retired not daring to pick up the branch which she so much wanted (p.39).

Teresa's ambivalence is given further expression in her pity and fear of spinsterish Aunt Di, whom she resembles.

After the wedding she is witness to the embarrassing frustration and despair of her unmarried cousin Anne, smothered by the well-meaning Aunt Bea. The theme of the desperate unmarried woman is continued in Teresa's sister Kitty, who yearns to be 'safe, respectable', and eventually escapes home to become housekeeper to a middle-aged widower who might marry her.

The urge to become attached to a man is presented quite clearly by Stead as a result of female dependence and insecurity, economic and emotional. The fear of failure, of rejection and loneliness, is a powerful motivation:

> All the girls dimly knew that the hole-in-a-corner marriages and frantic petting parties of the suburbs were not love and therefore they had these ashamed looks; they lost their girlish laughter the day they became engaged, but those who did not get a man were worse off. There was a glass pane in the breast of each girl; there every other girl could see the rat gnawing at her, the fear of being on the shelf. Beside the solitary girl, three hooded madmen walk, desire, fear, ridicule. "I won't suffer," she said aloud, turning to the room to witness. "They won't put it upon me." (p.74).

Depressed by their thwarted and painful longings, Teresa urges marriage on her brother Leo, Kitty and Anne. Yet she herself retains a romantic conception of love as a fundamental bond, mystical and sensual:

> She had a vague picture of her future in her mind. Along the cliffs on a starlit night, very dark, strolled two figures enlaced, the girl's hair, curled as snail-shells, falling back over the man's shoulders, but alive of itself, as she leaned against him walking and all was alive, the resolute leaves, the binding roots. This she conceived happened in

> passion, a strange walking in harmony, blood in the trees. The playful taps and squeezes, wrestling and shrieking which Leo had with the girls was not what she expected and she did not think of this as love (p.73-74).

Teresa indulges her adolescent addiction to love's mystery and sensuality by playing erotic dress-up games, mooning over the night and the ocean, and ranging through literature for correlatives for her heady sense of life (p.76).

The first ten chapters of For Love Alone meticulously build up the background to Teresa's obsessive attachment to Jonathan Crow. Restless and dissatisfied with the life she is living, she identifies her longings for knowledge and freedom with the love of a man. Significantly, Crow is a Latin teacher at the coaching college she attends to educate herself. As a successful working-class student who travels overseas on scholarship, he is for her a symbol of the aspiration and the struggle to obtain education as a pass to a better life:

> To Teresa, all that he said was marvellous, full of the mysteries of adult life and full of the wisdom of the university hill in Camperdown. The university seemed to her a gleaming meadow, in which beautiful youths and girls strolled, untangling intellectual and moral threads, but joyfully, poignantly, and weaving them together, into a moving, living tapestry, something into which love, the mind, the soul, and living beauties like living butterflies and early summer flower-knots were blended... The university seemed to her a suburb of Oxford, Jena, or the Sorbonne. If she could get the fare to that suburb, she too could spend glorious days, full-blown hours teasing out the ideal and the real. She thought of how he had suffered and of the noble ideal which had kept him going, in his poverty and pain, for so long. She would do it too (pp.122-123).

Teresa's consciousness is split between the desire for marriage, with a man to cling to for safety, and an undefined desire for something larger and grander in life. Her resistance to social forms is more mental than actual: the vehemence of her private rejection of traditional sex roles and attitudes is not yet matched by her emotions and behaviour. There are small signs that she is gathering the strength to break away from 'the iron circle of home and work.' On the impulsive trip to Harper's Ferry, Teresa finds to her surprise that 'chains evaporate as soon as you try to throw them off', and that, 'it was only a matter of running away' (p.137).

The crazed old man who exposes himself to her while she is walking alone to the Ferry recalls the sexual tension between Teresa and her father, though with her characteristic imaginative subtlety, Stead doesn't spell this out:

> Suddenly she was sure that she was really pursued. She walked on in the same way, and listened. Yes, someone was following her in the dust, rather softly. She looked behind. It was the old man from the paddock ... When he was a few yards away he stopped, stood there in front of her shamelessly, making his gestures. She turned round and walked fast. How would it end? What would stop him? She did not even know why he did it. She heard him following. For no reason she was seized with flight and began to run, but after a short sprint, she was all in and fell again into a walk. The old man had begun to run too and was now just behind her. She turned round and said in a hoarse voice that she did not recognize:
>
> "What are you doing it for? Go away, you go on back." (p.165).

Teresa's panicky reaction suggests that she is haunted by

her father's teasing sexual power. The threatening figure of an unknown man suggestive of entrapment appears later in the novel, when Teresa is tempted to give up her struggle and marry Erskine. A man exposes himself in the vacant lot next to her workplace:

> In her ignorance of men's ways, she supposed this man was like the man on the road long ago at Narara, and she became very much afraid (p.287).

Engaged in contesting the repressive male authority vested in her father, Teresa sees all men bar Jonathan as threatening. In fact, Jonathan's morose passivity is more damaging to her than any of these sexually aggressive gestures.

Teresa asks herself of Crow, 'Could I love that man?', and proceeds to deny her sensuality and social impulses to prove her devotion to him. Blind to his true nature, she sees kindness and misfortune where there is only manipulative selfishness and defeatism. Jonathan is like one of the diabolical males referred to in Ann Ronald's article, 'The Female Faust'. Mrs. Percy's religious extremism does not detract from the essential truth of her letter to Teresa warning her that idealism is dangerous. She writes of Crow:

> "Your sweetheart is getting you because he wanted to use for his own ends a very rare tool, namely, a woman as guileless and unsuspecting as a child who yet had very exceptional mental acumen.
> Well, he got you, kept you, used you, and now YOU have what you could never have got otherwise, the rarest insight into one department of deviltry..." (p.105).

Jonathan pays lip service to feminist ideas, inveighing against feminine coquetry and ineffectuality, and

claiming that, '... they'd be happier if they faced life the way we do.' Yet his 'love cult' as Rasche terms Jonathan's discussion group of admirers, is an exploitation of women which is motivated by his fear and contempt of them:

> Rasche sneered: "I congratulate you, sir, on the love of woman, fair woman. Nobly cutting himself off from his equals, he goes out among the women and will prove to anyone — if she wear a spirit — that she must modify herself for men. If she don't suit, too bad for her. No, she must accommodate herself to being the universal mother, and he takes a yardstick to her skirt, too, to find out if it's too short or too long. Mr. Crow, after much floor-scrubbing in the university, will shortly go abroad to try his excellent new system of female education on the English, the French, and so on. Or How the Modest Man Can Ravish Women with No Cost to Himself, Lonely Women, or the Town. Why don't you act like a decent chap, eh? — go to bed with the girls and cut out all this hanky-panky. You know darn well what you're doing. It's an old trick, every lady-killer of the church does it." (p.172).

Rasche has his exact measure.

Jonathan's reductive and cynical attitude to life is expressed in his conversation with Rasche's sister Clara, who is in love with him. He asserts that slavery is a kind of instinct with women, and that love is a slave emotion, like a dog's (p.176). He equates sexual desire with the desire to fawn on someone. Ironically, the women in the novel do fawn on him.

Teresa sees Jonathan's uncertainty and deplores his pinched and unhappy sense of life, which she believes is caused by 'the martyrdom of penury' (p.194). Their relationship is awkward and unsatisfying to both, but for

different reasons. Jonathan's sexual ambivalence is seriously incapacitating. On an outing near a shore frequented by lovers, the contrast in their attitudes is telling:

> A murmur came from the bushes. She looked closely at him and laughed. In his embarrassment and fright, he was repelled. He saw all the cheap couples before and after who had used this glade, the clumsy sitting side by side, the girl waiting for a kiss, the fumbling, it was not for that he had come out... (p.211).

Teresa's ambivalence is more social than sexual. Her indulgent laughter at the courting couples suggests her acceptance of the same sexual impulse in herself. However, she suffers uncertainty about expressing her desire. Her proclamation of love in a letter to Jonathan is an attempt to vindicate herself, to prove herself the exception to his theories about women's pedestrian cowardice:

> She believed that no woman had ever done this bitter, shameful, brave thing before. If people knew of it they would think she was pushed to it by fear, as she was (pp.225-226).

Teresa begins to concentrate all her energies into winning Jonathan:

> ... she superstitiously came to think that if she gave up this boy, she would lose him and all other men, it was a symbol; this, or a life without men, a body without children. If she won him, she would succeed, and in some mysterious way conquer her life and time (p.226).

She vows to 'improve herself so much that she would be lovable' (p.228), and on Jonathan's departure for England, 'She buckled down to the immense task.' (p.245). The four year monomaniac regime of hardship she embraces in order to

save her fare to England narrows her experience and makes her a physical wreck from hunger and exhaustion:

> If she won Jonathan Crow, it would be by superior will and intelligence; but this will and intelligence she had to devote to diverting her passions, because she had evolved the curious idea that she would only win Jonathan Crow by bridling passions as far as she was able, because of Jonathan's own self-denial (p.256).

The quest for Jonathan's love may be seen as a female version of the Romance myths about the trials of the hero. The difference is that instead of the idealized object of desire, or the wise person or omnipotent god establishing the rules, Teresa sets <u>herself</u> tests of physical and moral endurance. She allows herself very little margin for error, and is much less forgiving of herself than a benevolent authority might be. Further, Jonathan is patently-ly an unworthy goal.

The second part of <u>For Love Alone</u> begins with Teresa's arrival in London, and develops the impasse of her relationship with Jonathan. She continues to endure his cruel thoughtlessness. He details his affairs with other women in her presence, treats her private letters as common property, and offers her back the seven-panelled Legend of Jonathan she had so painstakingly drawn as a tribute to him. After he has callously discussed yet another of his infatuations, Teresa thinks,

> "Men — or women — are egotists by nature and lovers must bear with them, for lovers are made differently, we are made patient, it would be cruel to quarrel over such a naïve confession." (p.319).

Instead of annoyance:

> These confessions aroused in the young woman feelings of tender and passionate love. She suffered for him and for he herself. The idea that he had had no luck at all, and his teeth had been chattering, his body starving and his pathetic love rejected all these years gave her an almost mortal pain. She could love and did love him, but to him she loved, she could not give the gifts of love (p.320).

Teresa believes that Jonathan's coldness towards her is evidence of a neurosis, and that '... she had wronged him by not cultivating her physical passion for him... She had always been convinced that if she allowed one carnal hope to steal into her ideas about Jonathan she would never have him...' (p.328).

Teresa is sufficiently deluded about Jonathan to miss the significance of his calculated references to the guesthouse maid, Lucy, with whom he has been sexually involved for some time.

Slowly the scales begin to fall from her eyes:

> Despair, even anger, flashed in and out of her; did he intend it to be her fate to dangle after him? Why should she attempt so much when he was resigned to mediocrity, clung to it, in fact, with a fierce grasp? But she repeated one of her favourite phrases to herself — "hug a bad bargain closer" — and she could not give up the fight, not after such a beginning (p.329).

She remains infatuated with Jonathan, but becomes more and more uneasy about him with time. In response to his definition of love as an illusion, a bourgeois self-indulgence, Teresa asserts its imprtance to her,

> "To me —" She found it hard to speak. She felt as if she were being blown out into the dark sky. She became grave. "You see, to me, it's quite different. It's like that sky, with the stars in it,

> dark, but longer than our lives and serene, distant, something that is there, even when we don't see it. But I do see it. I am in love when I am not in love. I have been in love all my life" (p.332).

As she becomes more clear-sighted about Jonathan, she is able to make plans to study French and travel. She begins to free herself from the immobilisation of her obsession.

Feeling that she was now a woman, and remote from '... the foolish romantic girl who had got on the boat six weeks ago', Teresa coolly reviews the state of her association with Jonathan and acknowledges that it is dissatisfying. She writes to him seeking to know where she stands, and receives back the damning words, 'I do not love you, I never did and feel no affection for you' (p.345). This sets in motion a painful puzzling out of the course of their affair, in which she refers bitterly to 'the rigmarole of her buffoon Odyssey', and takes its failure as 'proof that she was a detestable thing, an ugly, rejected woman, distorted and lost' (pp.348-349).

Teresa continues to see Jonathan when he asks her to visit him at home, even though he continues to humiliate her. However there are indications that she is beginning to recover the strength of her personality. She decides to begin a book about Miss Haviland, whose struggle for education she values and defends against Jonathan's scorn:

> Teresa said she was a sheep-shearer's daughter, cooking for twelve men when she was just a child. She had studied at night, with the insects crowding the kerosene lamp. She came to the university twelve years late. Desert suns, privations, her force of character and application, also had taken away all her feminine charm, she

> had no money for clothes. "I never knew," said Jonathan. He was silent for a moment. "But what is there to to write about in that. It was ridiculous, wasn't it?" (p.353).

Teresa refuses to allow Jonathan access to her writing about Miss Haviland, which she wants to call 'The Testament of Women', or 'The Seven Houses' (p.371).

She begins to refute Jonathan's opinions. In response to his challenge that few women have sufficient courage of their convictions to live freely with men, she says, "We love like men. But men don't like it. You see, they're backward too' (p.356). Teresa recognises, finally, the obsessive and destructive nature of her continuing involvement with Jonathan, and has an urge to be rid of it.

By now, Teresa has secured an office job with a business partnership. One of her employers is James Quick, a dapper American who is attracted to Teresa, sympathetically aware of her mysterious suffering, and curious about her circumstances. Stead characterises him as a man '... who loved women as equals; that is, as men love friends, knowing and humbly loving all' (p.364). Quick divines that a man is the key to Teresa's distress:

> "Intelligence, energy, idealism," he said to himself, "don't help a woman at all to pick out the criminal or even betrayer of the other sex, in fact they peculiarly indispose her to suspect anything..." (p.394).

He sees Teresa and Jonathan together, and walks the streets at night near where she lives out of curiosity and loneliness. But he is hesitant about intervening, and mocks

himself as a would-be knight-errant (p.395).

In the meantime the tea-visits to Jonathan continue, and their conflicts surface more readily. Teresa reacts with horror to Jonathan's suggestion that she should face doing without love, as he does: 'Why not?' he asked. 'Never,' said Teresa (p.379).

Chapter Thirty-three 'A Deserted Sawmill', is the crisis in Teresa's rejection of the relationship with Jonathan. A deep well signifies the frightening depths of her self-abnegation. Teresa muses, 'What if I should fall in, that he would find me choking the exit in the morning? "Teresa with drowned hair and cheeks of sod ——" no,no' (p.408). She resists the urge towards self-destruction, and, later, the psychological turning point of her break with Jonathan comes:

> She stood between the drop and the ragged hole in the floor. She could only come back one way, by the way where he stood. A few feet from her, he also stood now between the hole and the well. They looked at each other and the same thought flashed between them. "He (or she) could go without regret, why doesn't that thing of misery do it?" They looked at each other by the light of the flare with unveiled dislike. Teresa, looking at him, released him from her will; it happened suddenly. The harness of years dropped off, eaten through: "How stupid he is! How dull!" (p.408).

Teresa's new understanding of herself is expressed in her Testament. She no longer distances herself from the material by writing about Miss Haviland, but creates 'something called 'The Seven Houses of Love'; the ages, a sacred seven, through which abandoned, unloved women passed before life was torn out of their clenched, ring-

less, work-worn fists...' (p.419). The Testament is a bitter exorcism of her suffering, richly ornamented with Dantesque images of torment.

The final stage of her liberation from Jonathan is marked by an acknowledgement of her love for Quick, and a letter from Miss Haviland telling her of Jonathan's female experiment of writing love letters to five women asking them to come and live with him. Confronting him with this truth, she realises that she herself was a case history for him, and had been deceived in many ways.

Although she refuses to see him again after this, her thoughts are not entirely free of his oppressive influence: 'I shall never understand Johnny Crow,' said Teresa. 'I can only ask, why?' (p.463).

James Quick's love for her gives her a recovered sense of identity:

> She was conscious of two desires, to accomplish her Testament, which had now become the "Triumph of Life", and to get to understand and love men, from whom she had been wrongly, feloniously separated for so long (p.458).

For Teresa, marriage to Quick is not the end of her quest for love, simply a stage within it. She senses early on that Quick is disconcerted by the strength, honesty and variety of her love:

> She realized her mistake, with a pinching of the heart, and at once abandoned the thought of telling him the truth about her love. There were a thousand sides to it, it was pervasive, strong, intellectual, and physical, but he only wanted "a woman's love", the intensely passionate, ideal, romantic love of famous love affairs (p.459).

But for Teresa, 'Love sees everything. Like insanity, it sees everything; like insanity, it must not reveal its thoughts' (p.460). In valuing her own perception of reality, 'her secret life', Teresa stabilises her sense of self. She develops a sense of mastery and of openness to experience which is vindicated in her faith that love is not a tranquil reward in marriage, but an endless capacity within individuals:

> Her hunger had made her insatiable, and she was not content, as he thought she would be, with what he told her, she was not at all satisfied with the end of physical craving; she wanted to try men (p.464).

The satisfaction of her great desire to love makes her more restless and energetic than before, which Quick feels is wrong in a woman. However he doesn't obstruct the development of her attraction to his friend Harry Girton. Teresa identifies the potentialities of her own life with Harry's wanderings around the world: 'She thirsted after the track-making and wandering of the man in the world, not after the man' (p.492). At this stage, Teresa is essentially independent of any man in her quest, and is achieving an emotional integration: 'She was withdrawn into an inner room of herself and here she found the oracle of her life, this secret deity which is usually sealed from us' (p.490).

On her return to Quick after the weekend in Oxford with Harry, Teresa feels that:

> '... this is the only love, but not the first and not the last. I will know how to make myself a life apart. If James robbed me, I would dislike

> him for my empty heart, but as I know how to cultivate my heart and mind in secret now, I can only love him for giving himself to me' (p.496).

The novel ends with a chance encounter between Teresa and Jonathan in an eerie London street at night. They do not speak, and Jonathan hurries away. Teresa says to Quick, 'I can't believe I ever loved that man.' Her final pronouncement: 'It's dreadful to think that it will go on being repeated forever, he — and me! What's there to stop it?' (p.502) is ambiguous. On one hand, it suggests that the suffering was a mistake, a wasted part of her life and that of all women who have loved or will love Jonathan Crows. Yet the experience has had value for her, however painful, as the precursor to the exercise of her liberated attitudes to life and love.

Telling the story of her camel trek across the central Australian desert, Davidson expresses various attitudes towards the men she encounters in the outback. The three most significant men are Kurt, the wily German camel-trainer who hires the author as a live-in apprentice on his farm; Rick, the National Geographic photojournalist covering her story; and Eddie, the aboriginal elder who travels with her through Pitjantjara tribal lands.

Davidson tends to distinguish between outback men who have qualities of directness, kindness and serenity; and the corrupt and aggressive bush masculinity which confronts her in Alice Springs and the tourist camps. Travelling by train from Adelaide to the Alice, she is aware of entering alien territory:

> 'G'day, mind if I sit 'ere?'
> (Sighing and looking pointedly out
> the window or at a book.) 'No.'
> (Dropping of the eyes to chest level.)
> 'Where's yer old man?'
> 'I don't have an old man.'
> (Faint gleam in bleary, blood-shot eye,
> still fixed at chest level.) 'Jesus
> Christ, mate you're not goin' to the
> Alice alone are ya? Listen 'ere, lady,
> you're fuckin' done for... (pp.20-21.

This sardonic, tight-lipped humour is typical of Davidson's tone in relation to chauvinistic men. It is an armour which deflects harm or insult from her vulnerable self; and becomes a necessity for a youthful female outsider in the pub-culture of Alice Springs.

In contrast to these men, Eddie contributes to the process of healing or knitting herself together, which takes place on the trip. Davidson is able to drop her defensive stance and be herself with him because he does not undermine her confidence or prescribe her behaviour. For Eddie, her identity as a white subsumes her identity as a woman. Ironically, Davidson is treated as less of an oddity by the blacks than she is by the whites, who share her cultural background.

The arch-villan of Tracks is Kurt Posel, who agrees to teach Davidson about camels and sell her one of his animals if she works for his camel tourist business for eight months. She has her doubts about him from the start, but decides to endure his temper and fussiness when she realises that he is 'a wizard with camels.' Their association seesaws uneasily between occupational camaraderie and a state of feud. Her frequent despairing urges to give up are countered effectively by Kurt's

promises of assistance: 'He had me over a barrel but there was nowhere else to go if I wanted to breathe life into my dream' (p.40).

When Kurt persists in undermining her by demanding more and more work, and making himself more and more objectionable, Davidson revolts and goes to work for an old Afghan man instead.

After a year in the Alice, she feels that the experience has changed her. Doing battle with Kurt has been a test of her ability to fight the forces against the realisation of her dream. It is clear that Kurt is not threatening merely as an individual man, but as a symbolic focus of male power. Because Davidson wants the things that he has the power to bestow, camels and training, she is forced to propitiate and cajole:

> So there followed a game of cat and mouse with my tormentor. To convince him that I had every intention of buying, I had to spend most of my time up there, pretending to prepare for a take-over (p.74).

She finally gets the camels she wants when Kurt secretly sells the ranch to inexperienced new owners, who give her the animals at a price she can afford.

Davidson's meeting with the photographer, Rick, comes at a time when she is desperate for money to buy the equipment she needs to take camels into the desert. She takes little notice of him at first:

> He was a nice enough boy - rather Jimmy Olsenish I thought — one of those amoral immature photo-journalists who hop from trouble spot to trouble spot on the globe

> without ever having time to see where they are or be affected by it (p.92).

Rick talks her into writing to National Geographic for sponsorship, something she had failed to obtain years earlier. But this time she is successful, and feels mingled relief and regret:

> It meant that an international magazine... would have a vested interest in, would therefore be a subtle, controlling factor in, what had begun as a personal and private gesture (p.102).

Rick is surprised that her exhilaration at clearing the last hurdle for the trip to become real is so short-lived:

> But how could I tell him that he was part of the problem? That he was a nice guy to talk to but I didn't particularly want him or his Nikons or his hopelessly romantic notions along on my trip (p.104).

Davidson is unable to regard Rick as 'a necessary machine without feelings, a camera in fact' to whom she can be 'nasty, vicious and cruel' without conscience. Instead, she warms towards his character:

> Rick had an outstanding quality, apart from his practised lovableness, and that was his naïvety. A fragility, a kind of introverted sweetness and perceptiveness that is rare enough in men, and virtually unique in successful photographers. I liked him. And I realized that he needed this trip perhaps as much as I did. Instead of getting away from all responsibility to people, I was obviously heading straight into a heavy one. And I felt robbed (pp.104-105).

The uneasy relationship with Rick plays itself out on the trip, altering it in a way which appears to her to

compromise her ideal of independence. In fact, by meeting her need for affection and conviviality, Rick reinforces her strengths.

Davidson's discomfort about Rick's involvement in the trip is connected with her attitude to close emctional relationships in general. Earlier in Tracks, she admits to a guardedness with men:

> I had somehow always countered my desire for a knight in shining armour, by forming bonds with men I didn't like, or with men who were so off the air there was no hope of a permanent relationship (p.54).

She also appears to be troubled by her emotional life with her family. When her father and sister arrive to farewell her, Davidson perceives the emotional charge focussed on her trip, particularly by her father. It is not clear exactly what pain was suffered or why, simply that the death of the mother bound the three together through guilt and mutual protectiveness. Though there is little explanation from the author, this partial revelation suggests that the need to lay the ghost of her traumatic childhood is an important aspect of her quest. In her attempt at a difficult physical journey through inhospitable land, Davidson shows her close identification with her father as explorer, risk-taker and individualist. He, in turn, projects his needs onto her trip. 'I began to see how much it meant to him and how much it would take out of him' says Davidson (p.109). There is an implicit expectation that her quest should carry the burden of symbolically absolving the pain of their shared past. It is not surprising, then, that Davidson fears

the emotional demands of men. She is anxious to shed old burdens rather than assume new ones.

Although Rick's periodic arrivals on the scene destroy the serenity of her aloneness, they lessen the tension of isolated self-reliance and unrelenting introspection. His incompetence in the desert both highlights her resourcefulness, and serves as an escape-valve for pent-up feeling. On one occasion, after spending a frustrating day backtracking in the fear that he is lost or in trouble, Davidson explodes with anger and resentment, and then weeps hysterically:

> That night injected two new elements into our relationship. The first was tolerance — that is, the necessity to compromise. It set the real basis for an unlikely friendship, which, although it was to have its ups and downs, was there to stay. The second was sex (p.147).

In her professed failure to inure herself to Rick, Davidson unwittingly humanises her story. In spite of her rejection of the camel-lady stereotype, Davidson does have a romanticised image of herself as remote and self-enclosed. The guilelessness of self-conscious writing allows for many small hints about personality, so that the attentive reader can pick up vulnerabilities and needs which are not acknowledged by the author. It is therefore amusing to follow the stages of Davidson's attachment to Rick.

Although there is a resolution of sorts, in her acceptance of Rick as part of the trip, her discomfort continues to surface in various forms. When he photographs the aborigines, for instance, she sees this as a

form of parasitism which implicates her as his companion.

The development of their friendship is finally acknowledged by Davidson as an addition to the significance of her journey, rather than a detraction from it. Because 'he had moved out from behind his camera and become part of the trip', Rick had shared her experience of being fundamentally altered by the time spent in the desert. By the final stage, her attitude towards him has moved from overt resentment, and covert fear of his charm, to strong affection:

> Now, without the pressure of feeling he had robbed me of something, or rather, with my acceptance of things turning out the way they did, plus the fact that Rick was a changed person, the friendship was firmly cemented (p.243).

Rick Smolan may be seen as performing the same function as James Quick within the female quest pattern. The man's love and good will reward the protagonist's new knowledge of herself, as her quest draws to a close.

Like For Love Alone, Jessica Anderson's novel Tirra Lirra by the River is a poignant, and sometimes ironic chronicle of a woman's frustrations and failures as she tries to find fulfilment in a man's world. Both novels, too, have titles with ironic significance. Teresa's heroic quest for love plays itself out in rejection and failure. The only real love she experiences does not derive from her self-sacrifice and striving. The phrase 'Tirra lirra,' heralds the arrival of the gallant knight Sir Lancelot in 'The Lady of Shalott', Nora's favourite childhood poem by Tennyson. But no Sir Lancelot appears

to relieve the desolate times in Nora's life, and most of the men she meets take unchivalrous advantage of her vulnerability.

Tirra Lirra by the River opens in the present, with Nora as an ageing woman having returned to her native Brisbane after many years in England. Nora finds that her childhood home has magical power to unleash her memories of the past. Confined to her bed with pneumonia, the house becomes, for Nora the vantage point from which she can view the development of her personality through the events of childhood, marriage, emigration, work, ageing, and the return to Australia. Though events take place in the present, the real substance of the novel is Nora's absorption in the intensely private world of individual experience and patterns of personal relationships. Her body is ministered to by a doctor, the house cleaned by a woman neighbour, and her association with the Custs next door pared down to practical details and her occasional questions about people and events from her childhood. Meanwhile, Nora's mind concentrates on the past, throwing up memories which sometimes comfort, and sometimes puzzle or disturb her.

Nora claims to derive 'perverse contentment' from reviewing the oppressive time of her youth. The quest she undertakes is a private and honest back-tracking through some seventy years of her life, a difficult operation because it throws up strong emotions. Nora likens her past life:

> ... to a globe suspended in my head,
> and ever since the shocking realization

> that waste is irretrievable, I have been careful not to let this globe spin to expose the nether side on which my marriage has left its multitude of images... It is miraculously suspended and will spin in response either to a deliberate turn or an accidental flick. The deliberate turns are meant to keep it in a soothing half-spin with certain chosen parts to the light, but I am not an utter coward, and I don't mind inspecting some of the dark patches now and then. Only I like to manipulate the globe myself. I don't like those accidental flicks. In fact there are some that I positively dread, and if I see one of these coming, I rush to forestall it, forcing the globe to steadiness so that once more it faces the right way. I have become so expert at this, so watchful and quick, that there is always a nether side to my globe, and on that side flickers and drifts my one-time husband... (p.25).

The dark patches on the globe of Nora's memory are all, significantly, to do with her relationships with men: Archie Cust, the precocious schoolboy who first stirred her sexually when she was twenty, her priggish husband Colin, and the shadowy father she can't remember grieving for, though somehow thinking of the mounted Sir Lancelot moves her profoundly.

In the lacing together of these male figures, the novel invites a psychoanalytic perspective. Nora's present stability and integrity of personality, indicated by her wry self-humour and her resistance to control by the Custs or anyone else, is to some extent dependent upon having the courage to explore her emotional history.

Nora has fossicked through her past in cosy conversational reminiscence with Liza and Hilda, her London companions at number six, but she admits that it was

selective and self-protective:

> But when I say that Colin Porteous is on that side, I mean, of course, the real Colin Porteous, because he has — or do I mean had — an edited version that I kept on the light side to present to chosen audiences... I have always had an understanding with myself that my evasion about the real Colin Porteous was to be only temporary, and that one day I would turn the globe round and have a good look at him (pp.25-26).

And of Arch:

> ... it occurs to me to wonder what they would have made of Arch at number six... And I remember too that this avoidance, and my impulse to change the subject, used always slightly to puzzle me. I knew it was not snobbery — my snobberies were never of that sort — and even as I diverted the flow of the conversation, I mentally charted those little snags of perplexity, so that 'one day' I could return on my tracks to examine and resolve them (p.98).

Throughout the novel there is a sense of mystery and suspense in the idea of her father, as if unlocking this memory will radiate significance over other events in her life. 'I can't remember a single thing about him,' Nora says (p.35), and refers to '... the fair young photographed face that is my sole recollection of him' (p.17). Nora's attitudes to men and sexuality have their roots in her childhood, and in particular the early bond with her father. In the novel, Tennyson's poem 'The Lady of Shalott' offers clues about Nora's attitude to her father, and to men in general.

The title of the novel explicitly refers to Nora's childhood reading of the poem from a book belonging to her father. Just as the optic distortions of rough

window glass produced for the child Nora a miniature idealized landscape for the imagination to feed upon, so the literary myth of Sir Lancelot serves as an escape from dull, cramped reality:

> I no longer looked through the glass. I no longer needed to. In fact, to do so would have broken rather than sustained the spell, because that landscape had become a region of my mind, where infinite expansion was possible, and where no obtrusion, such as the discomfort of knees imprinted by the cane of a chair, or a magpie alighting on the grass and shattering the miniature scale, could prevent the emergence of Sir Lancelot.
>
> From underneath his helmet flowed
> His coal-black curls as on he rode,
> As he rode down to Camelot.
> From the bank and from the river
> He flashed into the crystal mirror,
> 'Tirra lirra,' by the river
> Sang Sir Lancelot (p.9).

Like the Lady of Shalott, the child Nora is spell-bound and longing for release and fulfilment, pouring her romantic aspirations into feminine artefacts, and living in a world of wishful illusion. Once, walking by the river near her house, the young Nora had loosened her bodice and rolled over and over in the grass. Nora had dismissed the theory of her companions in old age that she had been looking for a lover without knowing it:

> But really, though I am quite aware of the sexual nature of the incident, I don't believe I was looking for a lover. Or not only for a lover, I believe I was also trying to match that region of my mind, Camelot... the very repression of sex, though it produced so much that was warped and ugly and cruel, let loose for some natures, briefly, a luminosity, a glow, that I expect is unimaginable now, and that for those natures, it was possible to love and value that glow far beyond the fire that was its origin (p.11).

For Nora, Sir Lancelot is an ideal male principle, strongly identified with the father who died when she was six. Of herself as a young woman she says:

> I no longer thought of Sir Lancelot. The war, and the boys under the camphor laurels had obliterated him. But perhaps not quite. At intervals all through my life, sometimes at very long intervals, there has flashed on my inner vision the step of a horse, the nod of a plume, and at those times I have been filled for a moment with a strange chaotic grief (p.16).

Nora's idolisation of her father explains her youthful tendency to idealize men into Sir Lancelots who will love and protect her.

In her retrospective account of her life, Nora recalls when she met Colin Porteous at a party. But it seems that an encounter with another man had had a much more dramatic impact on her:

> I am making my way through them towards the dancing when I come face to face with a dark man, thin and not young. I see him standing with one foot extended, reaching with a thumb and forefinger into the pocket of his waistcoat. He draws something out, perhaps a watch. 'Why are you looking at me with such horror?' he asks.
>
> He knew it was not horror. His voice was low, the look in his eyes like caught breath. I turned and ran, flaming with fear and excitement, into the big bedroom set apart for the girls. I stood in the centre of the floor, beating a fist against my mouth and saying softly, 'Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh.' Then I made up my mind, bent swiftly to the mirror to look once into my own eyes, and ran back to find him again.
>
> But where he had been standing, I found another man, similar but younger, and fair instead of dark (p.33).

The fair man is Colin, nephew of the debonair gentleman

who has just that minute left for India.

The archetypal effect of dark man and fair suggests a dualistic conception of men as attractive villains and golden spiritual saviours. Nora is prone to romantic infatuation with the older man, but she marries the younger, fairer Sir Lancelot figure who resembles her memory of her father. Colin is to replace the father whose early death has left her with a legacy of insecurity and irrational guilt:

> Nothing could deflect him from his covetousness of me. Having lost confidence in my own attraction, I could not imagine what I had done to deserve it (p.35).

Married to Colin, Nora's problems of self-doubt paralyze her will and cause her to deny the evidence of her senses:

> He was always very amiable about it. 'Well, you're frigid, and that's that. Women with your colouring are often frigid! And he would go on to tell me about 'passionate Spanish women' and 'experienced French women' in a way that I knew perfectly was puerile, though I would not let myself admit it lest it undermine my determination to be in love with him. The first substitute I made for him was a man I could love, and in this I was greatly supported by the happiness of my life while he was at work (p.37).

It is not that Colin is a villain, but rather the reverse: he is a conventional Australian husband of the time, expecting wifely subordination in exchange for his financial protection. It is his very normality that makes him so appalling a male character.

Confined to powerlessness and dependence, Nora records a case of female disenchantment with traditional

marriage.

> '... at last I had begun to admit the truth — that my greatest need was not for a baby. Indeed, there were times when I thought that all I wanted in the world was to be left alone in my beautiful room, close to people who never asked, audibly or otherwise, who I thought I was, but who were nevertheless interested in the answer to that question' (p.43).

There follows 'five years of waste' in which Nora outwardly submits to the tyranny of husband and mother-in-law, but within nurses 'a sour rebellion.' In spite of this unvanquished corner of herself, she remains locked in passivity and silent misery. Her hopes for rescue and her dreams of escape are ineffectual, because she unconsciously denies herself any possibility of fulfilment:

> Never once did I allow these longings to take on the density of an ideal as I would formerly have done, but nor did I try to extinguish them. I kept them, rather, at a delicate distance (p.57).

Nora's acceptance of suffering may be explained as a perverse desire for punishment for the death of her father. It is significant that she tends to suffer for her sexuality, and at the hands of men.

As her unhappy marriage continues, Nora suffers agoraphobic neurosis and becomes 'thin and silent.' The release comes, unexpectedly, through Colin's request for a divorce and financial settlement on her as compensation. Nora's urge to leave Australia is her first act of self-assertion. On the ship to England she has what is to prove her last sexual involvement. The love affair is a happy one, but Nora determines upon a definite break on

reaching their destination:

> It was a bleak moment, but my cowardly spirit was consoled by not having put him to any sort of test. And I was consoled as well by gratitude for what he had taught me. I believed that our candour and loving freedom had shown me a happy sexual pattern by which I could live (p.75).

However, a sordid abortion is the unhappy consequence of the affair, and Nora renounces sexual expression for the rest of her life.

> This long restraint was variously interpreted by the people who knew of it or guessed it, the two most common explanations being that I was frigid or an unconscious Lesbian ... No, it was simply, at first, that I was frightened, and for that reason avoided the temptation of masculine contact. This gave me habits of stiffness and reticence which in turn deflected the overtures which by that time I may have met. At first it mattered, and then it stopped mattering (p.82).

After Colin, the second emotional confrontation with the dark patches of her associations with men is the memory of Arch Cust, 'my little Arcadian lover', whose thirteen-year-old sensual play and teasing had caused her to weep inconsolably for shame as a young woman of twenty. The importance of this dawns on Nora. The excess of weeping over that incident had become linked in her mind with the repressed emotion of her brutal abortion in England:

> When I rejoined Olive in the abortionist's waiting room I told her he had been very nice, very kind. When I rose to face the Custs I kept a hand over the torn buttonholes of my

> blouse. I spare nobody or nothing but my own pride. The springs of my shame were not in morality (p.96).

Further to authenticate her solution to the puzzle, Nora admits the physical similarity between Arch and her shipboard lover. Both had broad bodies, wide cheekbones and big, concave teeth.[7] This self-honesty enables an acceptance of her past:

> In the bathroom mirror I look with equanimity at an old woman with a dew-lapped face and hands like bunches of knotted sticks. I lean calmly to the cool water. Well, I am what I am. The tenderness and indulgence stirred by the recollection of Arch still lingers in me. I forgive myself everything. (p.99).

The final enigma has not yet been unravelled. As she rummages through a drawer in her old room. Nora discovers a photograph of her father, but finds that, 'the more pleadingly I stare, the more expressionless, the more impersonal, that young fair face becomes' (p.101).

In the present, Nora begins to convalesce, and sustains a serene domestic existence. She enters her last period of waiting, like the first 'because once again I am waiting without panic, and with leisure at my disposal' (p.139). She refuses the busyness of handiwork because 'at present my concern is to find things. My globe of memory is in full spin...' (p.140). One day, with startling clarity, Nora remembers jumping from the back stairs into her father's arms. A little later, she recalls black mourning clothes, choking grief, '... and then out of a moment of groping, of intense confusion, comes the step of a horse, the nod of a plume, come the

plumed heads of the curbed horses at my father's funeral' (p.141). Her memory is restored, with its illuminating connection between the funeral horses and Sir Lancelot's horse in 'The Lady of Shalott.' Nora's subconscious association of death and loss with men and love explains her past tendency towards masochistic acceptance of suffering.

Through her own efforts, the elderly Nora has reclaimed the secure self-love of that loved six-year-old daughter, and forgiven herself for seeking that lost father and lost self in marriage to Colin Porteous. It is this final esteem for herself and her achievements which unlocks the warm, flooding memory of her father. Although his untimely death was indirectly responsible for unhappiness in her younger life, Nora's delight and deep satisfaction at the memory recovered suggest that it is some consolation for her bleak emotional history.

In Elizabeth Harrower's The Watch Tower, the emotional ties between the members of the 'family' headed by Felix Shaw are destructive weapons of manipulation rather than bonds of love. To the outside world they present a functioning domestic unit of husband, wife and younger sister. The three characters are in fact embroiled in a private war of power abuse, victimisation and passive resistance. The sisters, Laura and Clare, become progressively alienated from each other by Laura's self-effacing loyalty to Felix, yet their concern for each other keeps them both locked in an intolerable situation.

Harrower's novel reads as a document of the damage women suffer in putting the demands of love and pity before those of self-protection and assertion. In its ironic juxtaposition of a complacent suburban exterior and nightmarish eruptions of violence, The Watch Tower is a disturbing exposé of the way in which sentimentality obscures the power-play underpinning relationships.

In her article 'The Compassion Trap', Margaret Adams claims that:

> This social manipulation of women's psychological resources is exploitation as blatant as the economic version... The compassion trap, with its underpinning philosophy and social systems, is one of the strongest forces in today's world and subverts and distorts both the individual identities and the social roles of women.[8]

She defines the trap as:

> The pervasive belief (amounting almost to an article of faith) that woman's primary and most valuable social function is to provide the tender and compassionate components of life... fundamental to this protective nurturing is the socially invaluable process of synthesizing diffuse and fragmented elements into a viable whole...[9]

In the first few chapters of The Watch Tower, the Vaizey sisters are seen as apprentices in the art of being dutiful and compassionate females. Their disingenuously helpless mother, recently widowed, withdraws the girls from boarding school to buttress her domestic life:

> Stella Vaizey was convalescing. She resided rather than lived with her

> daughters. Languid, detached, she allowed herself to be looked after. She could venture out safely now, because it had become obvious to the girls, without a word having been uttered, that someone so small should not have to labour: They were Australian, medium-sized mortals, quite lacking in their mother's fragility and exotic heritage. It was entirely natural that they should leap about, bruising their shins and hip-bones, cutting their fingers, acquiring circles under their eyes, in the process of fending for her and themselves (p.10).

Laura, who had been a top student, silently acquiesces in her mother's plan that she leave school early to get paid work. A poor job at Shaw's Box Factory is her first offer, though her mother suggests that 'Something very nice will turn up soon, you'll see!, and '... anyway, you're a born homemaker, a born housewife' (p.12).

With such a training in devoting herself to her family and pleasing her mother, it is a logical step from office wife to becoming Felix's legal and domestic wife. Laura's immaturity and insecurity strongly dispose her toward reliance on Felix as a saviour for herself and Clare. He is to take the place of the 'impractical' father whose death threw the girls upon the uncertain mercies of their mother. Felix's offer to pay for Clare's schooling virtually clinches the marriage:

> Apparently he wanted very much to marry her. He wanted her to live in his beautiful house. He wanted to help and take care of her, be responsible even for Clare. Mr. Shaw, Felix Shaw, Felix, a stranger who had no obligation to, had all his attention focussed on her, hoped for something of her, asked her a favour, wanted to be kind as this to her (p.38).

Laura has her qualms. She is pleased by Felix's presents, 'though in another indefinable way they made her uneasy' (p.39). She sees marriage to Felix as a relinquishment of anxious responsibility, and a state of security:

> The knowledge that she could, if she chose, be relieved of all her responsibilities, lifted Laura to such heights that she felt almost literally buoyant. Not to have to worry and plan for three seemed so glorious a collection of negatives that Laura supposed she must be terrifically happy. Evidently, it looked as if, she loved Felix Shaw (p.40).

A typical 'Faustess', Laura is naïvely convinced that the marriage bargain with the potent and self-interested Felix is for her a felicitous one. Yet from the beginning there are ominous signs that it is not:

> On the sunny windy wharf, beside the big, camouflaged ship, with a war in progress, having just been married, saying good-bye to her mother, Laura felt herself falter. None of this — wharf, ship, war, marriage, farewell — was of her planning. Who had constrained her? She felt like an object (p.43).

Prefiguring the placatory role she is to play within the marriage, Laura wears a small wreath of olive leaves on her head (p.44).

Adams, writing of the compassion trap, claims that:

> Women in general have been restrained from any uncompromising or threatening action on their own behalf for fear of negative repercussions on other individuals to whom they stand in a protective role.[10]

Laura's concern that Clare be taken care of as well as herself contributes to her submission to Felix's initial petty cruelties, and then sustained psychological

persecution of her. However, Clare is also implicated in the Faustian bargain. Laura's collusion requires hers too, and far from being protected by Laura's marriage, Clare is drawn into its subterranean patterns of violence and manipulation:

> Clare was not meant to contribute... but Felix did like her to listen, did like to have her there to be knocked down, as it were, by the blows from his eyes and his words (p.53).

In contrast to Clare's bitterness, Laura obtains a kind of satisfaction in her subservience to Felix, losing herself in the role of helpmeet and refusing to admit what she does not wish to see, his vicious and power-hungry nature:

> Later she worked it out that he had been joking, though very roughly. Her inability to comprehend Felix with any certainty often fatigued Laura. But he did need her; he was her task. She supposed he must be an enormously subtle and complex man: he was not, obviously, what he sometimes seemed (p.62).

Truly downtrodden as wife, Laura manipulates from beneath with the classic covertness of female aggression. She calculates a dominion of submission and sacrifice, cajoling and flattering Felix, and co-opting Clare by soliciting her pity and love.

Felix's increasingly more frequent bouts of violent temper can only be appeased with Clare's assistance. She assumes the role of daughter to Laura and Felix, maintaining the uneasy balance of the relationship by defusing its tensions and diverting Felix.

The springs of Felix's nature are never fully revealed to us, though there are clues that his antagonism has its basis in a contorted sexuality. His misogyny is apparent even to Laura:

> Neither Felix nor Peter had a high opinion of women as a sex. Felix on occasion had even seemed to taunt her with being a female (p.61).

Felix courts a series of younger men he meets through his business, allowing them to take financial advantage of his intense need for male camaraderie. One of these men, Peter Trotter, gives Felix a china figurine of Bluebeard:

> 'Me! Peter said it reminded him of me.' He held the small dark china face close to his own and assumed a terrible leer (p.46).

Its 'dark brilliant eyes' and 'malicious smile that never tired' are recalled by Felix's fearful appearance at moments of violence:

> He lurched to his feet. Oiled strands of his brushed-back hair fell over the jagged scars on his forehead. His face was contused, his gestures terrifying, his expression ogrish (p.67).

Felix is a Bluebeard in his sexual hostility and self-importance as well as his sadism. He is threatened by any gesture of independence from his rule. When Clare does not come home for dinner:

> ... it was chiefly the thought that Clare sometimes chose to spend her time with some unknown male, in preference to spending it with Felix (who was a man, too!) that made him smile sarcastically at her with dark, demanding offended eyes (p.117).

It is as though Clare is also married to Felix, one of his

'harem' as he jokingly calls the two women. Her every attempt to escape is blocked by the obligations of love and pity for Laura and gratitude to Felix:

> There was to be no end to the pity she must feel for Laura. Her heart hardened. She hated pity. She hated Laura. She hated her febrile strength, her placating smiles, her tentative movements. She hated her nervous headaches, her obsessive nature, her selfishness, her self-sacrifice, her martyrdom, her masochism. She hated her because she clearly willed to think that a gold bracelet might have the power to influence anyone, and had once known better. But above all she hated Laura for the contempt in which she held herself (p.132).

Clare is witness to the gradual erosion of Laura's identity, and her evasion of the truth of her oppression by Felix. She herself is aware of the contorted nature of the relationships in Felix's house:

> Some suffering must be clean compared with this, she thought. There was collusion here. There was nothing not depraved, perverted. There was no feeling of sufficient grace to earn the name of suffering (p.145).

Clare alternates between perversely rebellious impulses of self-injury, gnawing her fingers until they bleed and willing fatal accidents on herself, and frustrated attempts to run away. She withdraws into unfeeling, living mechanically, and protecting the watcher within by silence and endurance.

Her isolation is broken by the arrival of Bernard, the young migrant employed by Felix who stays with them to recuperate from an illness. Clare is at first unwilling to nurse him, but finds in his need of her an avenue

of action and authority: 'She could encourage someone to stay alive. And this was what she was for' (p.171). Bernard becomes a kind of cause for Clare. She wrangles with the university over scholarships for him, and seeing him as her companion in a hostile environment, engineers his release with an energy she seems incapable of exercising on her own behalf. Laura and Felix assume that her concern is romantic interest:

> 'No,' she said now. 'No, not really, Laura.' In love with Bernard? She felt as if heavy irons had been cast about her. 'Break it down,' she protested feebly, thinking hard. They both — she and Bernard — had so much to do! Everything was waiting. Everything. Something in her wilted in surprise and despair at the thought that they were in any way tied to each other. Not free? (p.203).

When Bernard agrees to accept Felix's cynical offer of sponsorship, expecting that Bernard will be too beholden to him for work ever to leave for university study, Clare is devastated. The pattern of her own dependence is being repeated in him. Bernard is happily delivered from this fate by a windfall, precipitating another of Felix's drunken rages. This is the breaking point for Clare, who leaves the house with Bernard, while Laura stays behind.

With her knowledge of its consequences, Clare is able to reject the compassion trap in relation to Bernard:

> Meeting his eyes, Clare felt disloyal, cagey, ashamed of herself and surprised. But there it was: she would be relieved to go. Nothing she had done had been with the intention of attaching him to her side, dependent. On the contrary. Exclusiveness in personal relations, owning, being owned, being walled up, <u>exclusiveness</u>, she thought again, felt like a trap (pp.217-218).

Instead of accompanying him to Europe, she travels alone, by train, to the country.

Because she has witnessed Laura's moral disintegration as Felix's 'Hostage Number One' (p.76), Clare is determined to avoid the imprisoning bonds of conjugal life. Her scepticism about marriage recalls Nora's remarks about her shipboard lover in Tirra Lirra by the River:

> 'I would have been afraid to marry him. I felt it was precisely the absence of a future together that enabled us to love without cruel possessiveness' (p.74).

Clare's rejection of the prison-like world Felix has built around him is incomplete until she leaves his house, and her counterfeit self, behind. Her quest may be seen as an inward struggle to keep her judgment and thinking from being impaired by the unholy alliance of Felix and Laura. Ultimately, she finds the strength to place her own need for sanity and truthfulness before their emotional demands.

This Chapter has discussed the potential danger for the questing woman that a relationship with a man may assume the form of a consuming passion, a bond of obligation, or a mode of vicarious living; with consequences of personal fragmentation and suffering. Chapter Three looks at the ways in which these writers of female quest describe the destructive results, for women, of a culture based on male dominance and female submission.

CHAPTER THREE

IMAGES OF INSANITY AND DISEASE

The female quest in modern fiction has coherence if it is seen as a literature of social rebellion, of resistance to pressure towards conventional female existence. This rebellion is often expressed indirectly by physical or psychological disorders, rather than in aggressive confrontation with family members, lovers, or others who would control her. Many fictional quests which monitor a female character's progress from victimisation to the self-assertion of female maturity draw on images of obsession, illness and insanity.

The interior quest of the woman typically includes an experience of self-division. Because the term 'madness' suggests extremes of maladaptive behaviour, it seems inappropriate in this context. Whilst the alienation and suffering of female questing characters is often dire, their behaviour suggests strategies of adaptation to a social environment which is hostile towards them. R.D. Laing's understanding of the sane but distressed way of being-in-the-world of the schizoid (as opposed to the psychotic way of the true schizophrenic), is helpful:

> The term schizoid refers to an individual the totality of whose experience is split in two main ways: in the first place, there is a rent in his relation with his world and, in the second, there is a disruption of his relation with himself. Such a person is not able to experience himself 'together with' others or 'at home' in the world, but, on the contrary, he experiences himself in despairing

> aloneness and isolation; moreover, he does not experience himself as a complete person but rather as 'split' in various ways, perhaps as a mind more or less tenuously linked to a body, as two or more selves, and so on.[1]

Several literary critics have examined the vital concern with female dispossession and disease in the twentieth century fiction which concentrates on individual female experience. The genre which Moers identifies as 'Female Gothic fiction' is characterised by violent imagery of disease, despair and fragmentation.[2]

Like all writing in the Gothic mode since the eighteenth century, Female Gothic exploits the psychology of fear. Moers claims that women write particularly forcefully about fear of the self:

> The savagery of girlhood accounts in part for the persistence of the Gothic mode into our own time; also the self-disgust, the self-hatred, and the impetus to self-destruction that have been increasingly prominent themes in the writing of women in the twentieth century... to give <u>visual</u> form to the fear of self, to hold anxiety up to the Gothic mirror of the imagination, may well be more common in the writings of women than of men.[3]

Nola Adams argues that this concern with fear is bound up in female characters' shaky sense of ego and a recognition that power resides in the male sex.[4] Gothic fiction simply exaggerates the actual cruelty towards women in society.

<u>The Watch Tower</u>, with its nightmarish edge of suppressed panic, its Bluebeard imagery, and its pale, nervy women, may be seen as Female Gothic fiction. As Adams sees it:

> A world of dark sexuality, cruelty and imprisonment constantly informs the seemingly straightforward story of a marriage with problems.[5]

In For Love Alone, Teresa's sense of being haunted by deranged figures also has an air of the Gothic. In Tirra Lirra by the River, Nora's cringing retreat into herself in the face of Colin's emotional violence, has a brooding atmosphere similar to that of the domestic scenes in The Watch Tower.

These three novels have a questing character who develops a somatic symptom or phobia with a symbolic meaning. The illness is the external manifestation of a troubled psychological state. Teresa, Nora, and Clare share a number of painful body and mind disorders deriving from anxiety. Extreme thinness results from an obsession with savage self-deprivation. Withdrawal from the outside world implies a fear of losing the fragile self in transactions with others. Depression and despair are expressed by nervous rashes, exhaustion, and illness.

Luise Eichenbaum and Susie Orbach discuss female experience of spatial phobias, obsessions, and anorexia nervosa as representations of a woman's psychic prison:

> Women's social position means that the woman's sphere of influence is limited and that it is confined very much within her own home — if you like, within her own body... At the same time, as we know, certain aspects of a woman's life inevitably cause conflict which it may be impossible to express. The distress a woman feels, the conflicts she experiences, the taboos against her longings often show themselves, not surprisingly, in woman's terrain: her body. A woman may unconsciously express her distress through her body — a somatic symptom; or her body may react in a terrorized way to a particular object or event — a phobia.[6]

Gilbert and Gubar also examine the links between illnesses like anorexia nervosa and agoraphobia, and

patriarchal socialisation.[7] They suggest that such afflictions carry conventional definitions of 'feminity' to absurd degrees:

> ... any young girl, but especially a lively or imaginative one, is likely to experience her education in docility, submissiveness, selflessness as in some sense sickening. To be trained in renunciation is almost necessarily to be trained to ill-health, since the human animal's first and strongest urge is to his/her <u>own</u> survival, pleasure, assertion.[8]

Gilbert and Gubar draw on Freud's 'pleasure principle' proposal that egoism and self-gratification are normal human impulses, repressed by our education as social beings. The authors claim that women are more effectively repressed than men, and turn these energies into perverse channels:

> Learning to become a beautiful object, the girl learns anxiety about — perhaps even loathing of — her own flesh. Peering obsessively into the real as well as metaphoric looking glasses that surround her, she desires literally to 'reduce' her own body... Similarly, it seems inevitable that women reared for, and conditioned to, lives of privacy, reticence, domesticity, might develop pathological fears of public places and unconfined spaces.[9]

These theories go some way towards explaining the statistical evidence that women are far more likely than men to experience certain psychological symptoms.[10]

The central female characters in the five Australian quests I have chosen to examine each experience a despairing and divided self at some stage of their search for personal wholeness. Nora Porteous, Teresa Hawkins and Clare Vaizey develop physical disorders which are linked with their psychological distress. Depressive and

obsessive behaviour characterise each of the female protagonists of these quests. However, Theodora Goodman is ultimately the only one whose mental state is presented as permanently irreconcilable with the world. White suggests that madness, for Theodora, is a way of knowledge as valid as any other.

Self-division is given positive value as therapeutic suffering in Tracks and, to some extent, in Tirra Lirra by the River. Fragmentation may enable a catharsis of the fear and self-doubt which are the legacy of early pressure towards feminity. But it is usually presented as a pitiable loss of a woman's creativity and self-esteem. The Watch Tower, and For Love Alone are particularly harrowing documents of the waste of female suffering. Clare and Teresa are haunted by the bitterness of lost time, of years spent in unnecessary misery. For each of them, the recovery of self heralds the beginning of a new quest for a life befitting this new integrity.

Madness as a tragic reaction to an unliveable situation is seen most clearly in subsidiary female characters who are real or metaphoric sisters to the questing character. Unlike the protagonist, who exercises her capacity for self-rescue and ultimately drags herself out of the abyss, these alter-egos or 'doubles' typically accept the traditional female role with more or less grace. Teresa's female relatives in For Love Alone, Laura Vaizey in The Watch Tower, and Dorothy Rainbow and the Lady of Shalott in Tirra Lirra by the River, are peripheral female characters

who break down in ominous ways, and do not recover, because they can't or won't seek alternatives to capitulation and suffering. Their shadowy presence in these novels confirms the importance of successful rebellion for the protagonist, by suggesting the potential sequences of passive acceptance of discontent.

Anderson's novel, Tirra Lirra by the River, tells the story of Nora's efforts to gain a free, whole and joyful life in the face of destructive and imprisoning forces. Four peripheral female figures in the novel stand as signifiers of alternative ways of being-in-the-world to that which Nora has developed. Olive Partridge may be seen as Nora's artistic alter-ego. Grace, Nora's sister, is the woman Nora might have become had she not left home: outwardly a dutiful and good woman, but privately haunted by a sense of failure. Near the end of the novel, Betty Cust reveals to Nora that Grace had not been happy because she had felt 'That for the whole of her life, she had tried to have faith, and that for the whole of her life, she had only opinions' (p.135).

Dorothy Rainbow and the Lady of Shalott are Nora's most significant doubles in Tirra Lirra by the River, with the Lady of Shalott twice-removed, being fiction in fiction. Their stories offer submerged parallels to her own, implying ironic points of correspondence, as well as important differences, in their experience of being female.

The title of the novel, and references to Nora's imaginative assimilation of Camelot and other aspects of Tennysonian romance, is more than a fanciful analogy.

Anderson builds complexity and depth into the novel with symbolic overtones of 'The Lady of Shalott.' In the Tennyson poem, the cruel price of female naïvety is death. The Lady of Shalott is imprisoned in an island tower, isolated from the world yet feeding off its attractions at one remove, through reflections in a mirror. This vicarious living may be seen as the original female 'curse' deriving from the imprisoning myth that women are not the heroic characters in their own adventures. The Lady's constant weaving suggests female patience and industry, a training which keeps stronger impulses in check. She is restless, longing to join the life of Camelot — 'I am half sick of shadows', she says — but she is incapable of freeing herself from the spell of passive acceptance in order to act on her desires. She perceives the liberating qualities of courage, dynamism and pride as lying outside herself, in a man: Sir Lancelot is to rescue her and take her into the world. But her impulse towards him brings grave retribution:

> She left the web, she left the loom,
> She made three paces thro' the room,
> She saw the water-lily bloom,
> She saw the helmet and the plume,
> She look'd down to Camelot.
> Out flew the web and floated wide;
> The mirror crack'd from side to side;
> "The curse has come upon me," cried
> The Lady of Shalott.[11]

She dies an ethereal, tragic death, floating into Camelot in the bottom of a boat with her blood slowly freezing.

The young Nora shares the Lady of Shalott's weary yearnings for a full life, her artistic creativity, and her romantic conception of the rescuing male hero. She, too,

suffers from paralysing despair and disillusionment, but in a realistically awful marriage rather than a fantastic romantic tragedy. There is considerable irony in the idea of Colin Porteous as a male rescuer, offering protection and completion of Nora's self.

The most significant aspect of the literary analogy is the point at which the fates of the two women characters diverge. After the fear and pain of psychological disintegration, Nora learns to exercise her capacity for self-rescue, and lives to fulfil at least some of her desires. She safeguards and nurtures her self in old age, even developing the protective art of apparent conventionality: 'But now I am finding that when one is really outside, and alone, it is less of a burden (and much more private) to be thought quite ordinary. Besides, I am too tired at present to insist upon my madness', she says (p.4).

The elderly Nora thinks of her past life as a globe suspended in her head, its surface inscribed with a multitude of images. Mindful of her mortality, and sufficiently robust emotionally to afford the risk, she determines to face 'the nether side' of her life. Ill with pneumonia, her detachment from her surroundings gives her mental life a new kind of lucidity and acuity. She is able to face and to understand completely certain key experiences in her life. The most painful of these is her marriage to Colin Porteous.

Nora's psychological disintegration in marriage is the consequence of her loss of dominion over her self. Her unworldliness and penury predispose her to domination and

and manipulation by her husband. During the Depression her powerlessness is cemented by the lack of jobs for married women and Colin's insistence that they live in his mother's house. Nora's attempts to maintain some measure of control and self-esteem are courageous and pitiful. She lays claim to half a bedroom as her domain, decorating it to her own taste; pilfers money from her husband and mother-in-law to make secret trips into town; and fiercely studies French grammar and geometry from old school texts.

But these things do not remove her restlessness:

> I was thirty-one, thirty-two. Panic attacked me again, the strong bird rising. I began to walk again. The pattern I traced this time with my feet, dictated by streets and houses, was rectilinear, and as I walked I looked into the faces of passers-by, and hoped for rescue in fantastic ways. I was thirty-three (p.57).

Her sense of imprisonment grows, and with it the desperate yearning for escape. Colin becomes more and more a gaoler figure:

> I would wake to find that he had turned his head on the pillow and was staring at me with hatred, and I would turn away or leap out of bed. At the table I would bend over my plate to escape the same brooding stare. It was an invasion. My enemy had entered my hut and was squatting in a corner, waiting (p.60).

As with many depictions of madness in literature — in Kafka, for instance — paranoid delusions are often symbolically accurate perceptions of things.

Nora's growing terror of leaving the house is a common female phobia, sometimes called suburban neurosis or, tellingly, the housewives' disease. The images of enclosure and escape, and the depiction of the obsessive

illness, agoraphobia, in Tirra Lirra by the River place it firmly within the Gothic tradition in women's literature. Where the difficulties or risks of freedom exceed the resources of the individual woman, it seems that she has a propensity to turn her rage and frustration against herself. In Women and Madness, an investigation of the relation between the female condition and madness, Phyllis Chesler claims that the higher incidence of female depression documented by mental health statistics may be due to the female tendency to direct hostility towards the self rather than towards the agents of her oppression.[12]

The mirror-image of the internalizing sufferer is the woman who is criminally violent, an enduring character in female gothic fiction.[13] Dorothy Rainbow is a modern Medea, who, under some fearful internal torment, axes her children to death before suiciding. Her act suggests something of Medea's rage and resentment in the face of Jason's rejection, but Anderson does not disclose the specifics of Dorothy's personal life. We are left with the uneasy sense that her superficially perfect wife-and-motherhood masked a mass of discontents.

Dorothy also recalls the tortured soul of Bertha in Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre, whom Gilbert and Gubar claim,

> ... is Jane's truest and darkest double; she is the angry aspect of the orphan child, the ferocious secret self Jane has been trying to repress ever since her days at Gateshead.[14]

These critics suggest that Bertha is most threatening to Jane because she acts out Jane's secret fantasies. Although Dorothy is not as prominent in Tirra Lirra by

the River as Bertha in Jane Eyre, she serves a similar function in acting out the rage and despair of the silently, unhappy woman. She serves as an implicit warning that repression of feeling is potentially destructive of self and others. A similar use of the double may be seen in The Aunt's Story, where Lieselotte Wetherby's murderous passion functions as an externalization of the hatred and rage Theodora feels, but cannot accept in herself. The parallels drawn between Dorothy and Nora persist throughout the novel, suggesting that Dorothy is to be seen as a sister figure, or psychological double, to Nora. As a young girl, Nora used to encounter Dorothy Irey on the long suburban walks which served as pressure-valves for her sense of emotional and practical limitation:

> ... we would look with appreciation, with secret sharp recognition, at each other's clothes. The effect she gave, of darkness, freshness, and white lace, left me incredulous. She was rare and beautiful, and she was twenty-three. So why did she stay? My own patience was explained by my underlying conviction that I was going (p.14).

Nora's enquiries about Dorothy's state of mind have an intensity which suggests her identification with the older girl. 'Why does Dorothy Irey stay here?' she asks Grace. When Dorothy becomes engaged to Bruce Rainbow, Nora,

> ... looked from her to him, and asked myself, 'But why?' I didn't dare ask Grace, but at the wedding party I whispered it to Olive Partridge, 'But why?' (pp.14-16).

Later, Dorothy is busy with house and babies:

> Grace answered my enquiries by saying with the old anger that of course she

> was happy. 'Why shouldn't she be? She has all any reasonable person could want' (p.16).

When the physician attending her pneumonia turns out to be Dorothy's son, Nora's curiosity is roused by his evasiveness, and she suspects that Dorothy has become a taboo subject because she suicided. She discovers from Betty Cust that Dorothy had had a sort of breakdown characterised by agoraphobic loss of confidence:

> ... refusing to leave the house and hiding when anyone knocked. You know the kind of thing? 'Yes,' I say. 'I know the kind of thing' (p.126).

Nora's own experience of suburban neurosis deepens her sympathetic connection with Dorothy. She links Dorothy's despair with her own impulse to self-destruction after the war:

> It is strange that whenever I hear of a suicide I feel compelled to ask 'Why?' and 'How?' although I know from my own experience that the cause can be hard to define, and the means tend to be those nearest to hand — in Dorothy's case, a gas oven, and in my own, sleeping pills... (p.103).

Nora puzzles over the reason for her recovery from fragmentation, and Dorothy's surrender to it:

> I reflect that it was worth hanging on, provisionally, if only for the present blessing of sun on the skin. I ask myself why Dorothy Irey did not hang on, provisionally, and why nothing was offered to appease the remnants of that need that once drove her to walk. I think of how the web of her tracks across the suburb must have merged with the web of mine, and how in dry weather we both trod in little puffs of dust and left low cumulus trails behind us (p.112).

Although Nora continues to pay the price of the internalized

self-doubt and passivity learned before her divorce from Colin, this crisis jolted her into a revulsion from the dull weight of her wasted years, and in desperation, she had begun to act on her own behalf. Here, perhaps, lies the dividing line between Dorothy's failed life, and her own qualified success. Nora's 'failure' at wife and motherhood exposes her to the risks and rewards of independence. By contrast, Dorothy's conventionally secure life nurtures dark fears and impulses which ultimately destroy her.

Nora is ultimately a survivor. Her strength of understanding is transformed into wisdom. The healthy self-preoccupation of her old age, and her refusal to apologise for herself to herself, suggests that she has achieved wholeness. The byproducts of this personal power are knowledge, generosity and likeableness. Nora can forgive her sister Grace, whose prickly nature disguised a sense of failure. She can forgive herself for the 'vile wastage' of her younger life. By unlocking the repressions and fears of the past, she liberates a precious lost memory of her father, and so satisfies an obscure yearning of her heart. Nora has healed the split between herself and the world in a way that is denied her tragic female counterparts in the novel, Dorothy Rainbow and the Lady of Shalott.

Elizabeth Harrower's novels offer similarly perceptive accounts of the trapped lives of women, and the psychology of oppression. The Long Prospect, published in 1958, concerns an adolescent girl's search for identity

and community in an environment of adult irresponsibility and betrayal. In The Catherine Wheel (1960) Clemency James's confusing and damaging involvement with an attractive, self-absorbed wastrel suggests, for women, the dangerous combination of obsessive love and naïvety. The poignant sense of the cost of enlightenment for Clemency prefigures that of Clare in The Watch Tower. In both novels, mental distress manifests itself physically in illness. Recovery takes place when the woman develops the critical awareness necessary to free herself from a situation which threatens her moral and emotional well-being.

In The Watch Tower Harrower dramatises the dreadful ease with which women can slip into and feed oppressive relationships, and the enormous effort required to escape them. Laura and Clare are sisters in suffering as well as in blood, but Clare rebels successfully in the end. The tragedy of Laura's life is her resignation to suffering. Her unacknowledged need that Clare should justify this wasted life by sharing her fate adds to the horror.

Laura does acknowledge the pain of her loss of autonomy when Felix's violence shocks her into a brief escape from him. Walking aimlessly through central Sydney, her resentments and fears surface with frightening force. However, the habit of economic dependence and capitulation is too strong in her for change. In classic feminine manner she soldiers on in the marriage and expresses her distress through nervous tension and physical breakdown. She loses weight, develops a bright, tense, hyperactive manner, and is prone to devastating headaches.

In Clare, Harrower defines the psychological processes of women who desire autonomy and individuality, but are denied it. The image of the tower, and of watching out suggests the vigilance necessary to safeguard personal freedom, and also the isolation of that effort. Clare, the eternal watcher, slowly comes to see Felix for what he is, a man whose personal inadequacies and hostilities lead him to tyrannise his female dependents. In order to throw off his authority and evade Laura's emotional manipulation, Clare has to trust her own judgment and risk the loss of the nearest thing to a family she has ever had.

Like Laura, Clare initially responds to Felix's abuse of power with diffidence and uneasy complicity, although her private communings show that she is not as successful as Laura at repressing her self-betrayal. 'In a sense, to be obliged to assume an attitude she did not feel was the worst thing that could happen to her', she thinks, preparing to entertain Felix with a vivacious persona (p.76). Small signs of protest run counter to the evidence of her fragmentation and distress in the novel. These tend to be rebellious physical gestures rather than verbal objections. Sometimes they are direct and public: 'Clare raised an unwise eyebrow (something she had only recently learned to do) but no-one noticed' (p.57). More often, they are indirectly meaningful, such as being absent from the family sitting room. Her inability to repress her rage and despair entirely is captured most poigantly in the line, 'In a tumult of rebellion, she brushed her hair' (p.76).

After they come to live with Felix, both women gradually become estranged from their bodies.[15] Laura becomes anorexic and, it is implied, alienated from her sexuality. After becoming Felix's wife, she is 'almost relieved' that his everyday behaviour towards her reflects nothing of sexual intimacy. There are telling descriptions of the women's hands: 'Her hand was skeletal. The veins rose in blue welts from the milk white skin' (p.128). Clare's savagely bitten nails bleed, and she is hospitalised with tetanus from gardening with bare hands:

> She had not aimed as high as death, but she had been prepared to give her hand for her independence. <u>They</u> were not to damage her most. In her own way she would be free. In the only way she would out-reach them. She would go so far in damaging herself that they could never hope to touch her (p.95).

Clare's disconnection from her own body is most clearly expressed in her endurance of a sexually exploitative examination by a male doctor who is treating her for a skin infection:

> In the sober, dignified room, Clare's body could have felt conspicuous had she not perceived some years before that she and it were by no means one and the same person (p.72).

Laing's understanding of schizoid states underlines the significance of Clare's sense of being disembodied:

> When the self partially abandons the body and its acts, and withdraws into mental activity, it experiences itself as an entity perhaps localized somewhere in the body. We have suggested that this withdrawal is in part an effort to preserve its being, since relationship of any kind with others is experienced as a threat to the self's identity. The self feels safe only in hiding, and isolated.

> Such a self can, of course, be isolated at any time whether other people are present or not. But this does not work. No one feels more 'vulnerable', more liable to be exposed by the look of another person than the schizoid individual. If he is not acutely aware of being seen by others ('self-conscious'), he has temporarily avoided his anxiety becoming manifest by one or other of two methods. Either he turns the other person into a thing, and depersonalizes or objectifies his own feelings towards this thing, or he affects indifference.[16]

Clare's detachment from her body may be seen as an attempt to preserve her self from engulfment by Felix and Laura.

Close engagement with this kind of material is painful to bear. Harrower's searching account of two women's divided and isolated selves has a disturbing, almost clinical accuracy. Laura's wasting away is presented as a realistic response to her situation. Contemporary medical discourse on anorexia nervosa supports Harrower's depiction of it as a disease of psychological origin, linked with defective self-awareness and disturbed interpersonal experiences. In her study Eating Disorders, Hilde Bruch claims that self-starvation is a deviant avenue in the search for selfhood.[17] Fearful of being influenced from without, or of being empty and ineffective, the anorexic gains a sense of control and accomplishment from altering her body. Bruch notes that a trait of fundamental significance in severe eating disturbance, such as anorexia nervosa, is the basic delusion of not having an identity, and of not even owning the body and its sensations.[18]

Clare's sense that in damaging herself she is exercising her ownership of herself suggests a deviant avenue similar to Laura's anorexia. This perverse means of experiencing her feelings is the only expression possible for Clare in the circumstances. Unlike Laura, 'who would never know what she wanted not to know', Clare holds fast to her sense of identity as a person capable of feeling and judging. Mute and tense, she observes things from the watch tower of her isolated self. This quiet gathering of strength and knowledge keeps her inviolable. As long as she appears compliant, she cannot be appropriated by Felix.

Clare's tower is like that of the Lady of Shalott, and she recalls the window-musing Nora in Tirra Lirra by the River. The tower, or self, is a vantage point, and also a prison. Like these other watchers, Clare hopes for release from without:

> No one was coming. The gate remained wilfully, so quietly close. The white path was untrodden... Clare looked down from the open window, path and gate, to the printed page between her arms. The Cossacks. No one was coming yet. Patience (p.52).

Bernard, the pale young man who enters the closed domestic world of the novel near its end, is a most ironic comment on the male as rescuing hero. Turning the tables on convention, it is Clare who brings him back to health and optimism, and encourages his escape from Felix's clutches. She summons up on his behalf the worldliness and determination she needs for her own escape.

Clare's gradual withdrawal from the nightmarish world of Felix and Laura is possible because 'She had kept

her inner eye with passionate attachment on her way.' However, the sombre and tired mood at the end of the novel implies that her freedom from 'that futile, wasted, lacerated thing behind her — her life', will only be sustained with a continuation of effort and will.

Robyn Davidson's Tracks is a first-hand account of a woman's effort to reclaim the hidden or denied heroic self, and so escape imprisonment in the images of traditional feminity. Tracks suggests that when a woman ceases to play out the projections of her culture in order to be acceptable, she finds her true personality, and direct and creative action is possible for her. But there is a catch to this. Davidson's story illustrates the distressing isolation of female unconventionality in the painful conflict between her actual experience, and societal images of feminity. The experience of getting to know Alice Springs 'from the gutters up' and sensing its camouflaged violence encourages a self-protective form of paranoia:

> I had been in the Alice for almost a year now and I was a changed woman. It seemed I had always been there, that anything I may have been before was a dream belonging to someone else. My grip on reality was a bit shaky... The time with Kurt had had a weird effect on me — I was self-protective, suspicious and defensive and I was also aggressively ready to pounce on anyone who looked like they might be going to give me a hard time (p.48).

Davidson has considerable insight into this change in herself:

> ... it was essential for me to develop beyond the archetypical female creature who from birth had been trained to be sweet, pliable, forgiving, compassionate and door-mattish (p.48).

The act of spiritual separation from the dominant institutions and beliefs of one's culture is hazardous, throwing the individual back on personal resources which may not be adequate to sustain sanity. The questing woman is also in physical and emotional danger from the uncomprehending world.[19] Davidson is psychologically harassed by a section of the Alice Springs male drinking population, and by one of the camel-trainers she works for; she is betrayed by a traveller who sells a risqué account of their lonely outback meeting to a newspaper; and she is consistently hounded and misrepresented by the Australian press. It is no wonder that she becomes alternately aggressive, defensive and self-doubting in reaction to such pressure.

The alienation of the hero from conventional society is of course part of the traditional male hero's experience as well. It is interesting to compare Tracks with Patrick White's Voss, which is a quest for mastery of the wilderness and self.

Voss's expedition is a means of mortifying himself in a manner which exalts his difference from the ordinary. His dissolution of self in the desert suggests that wholeness of personality is only to be found through a humble acknowledgment of mysterious powers beyond the self. Such humility requires profound acceptance of self and situation. Unlike Voss, Davidson doesn't despise her own weaknesses, and she survives the fear and disorientation of confronting her elemental self in isolation. She perceives this disorientation as cleansing and productive, not demoralising,

as Voss does.

Davidson explains her psychological paralysis prior to the trip as the warring of two selves, the cowardly self which wants safety and the past, and 'that other self, who lived in dream and fantasy... All passion, no sense, no instinct for self-preservation' (p.89). Her sense of being 'split' recalls Laing's definition of the schizoid.[20] Later in Tracks Davidson expresses a similar sense of fragmentation of the self as a conflict of voices, all of which belong to her (p.158). However, her mental state here seems a reaction to the strains of desert travel, not specifically feminine like the earlier depression triggered by her reaction to Kurt.

Throughout Tracks, Davidson tries to articulate the startling mental changes she notices in herself, and her sense of being close to the edge of insanity at times. She is aware that her quest into the internal landscape does not translate well into the language and concepts of patriarchal society, and asserts that any confession of weakness or suggestion of mental struggle is denounced as morbid or indulgent because it is alien to a rational construction of the world (p.100).

At the end of her trip, Davidson looks back over her earlier fear of madness, seeing it as part of a necessary readjustment of consciousness:

> ... if you are fragmented and uncertain it is terrifying to find the boundaries of your self melt. Survival in the desert, then, requires that you lose this fragmentation, and fast (p.196).

In a world that sees men and women as incomplete complements

of each other, Davidson's camel trip is an effort to find, and to learn to trust, her full humanity. As discussed in Chapter Two, a mystical identification with nature aids the healing process.

Christina Stead's understanding of the psychology of women is inextricably tied to her social analysis. Like Harrower, she is a writer with an eye on economics. She sees how women's material poverty, due to lower pay and lower professional expectations than men, can inhibit their moral freedom. Economic dependence breeds fear and frustration, engendering sham marriages and pitiful anglings after financially secure men.

The early part of For Love Alone teems with women arrested in child-like submissiveness, like Malfi, Anne and Kitty; or stewing in their own neuroses, like Mrs. Percy and Ellen. The young would-be matrons on the harbour ferry, and the spinster school-teachers Teresa works with provide further evidence of the limitations of the female condition. The young Teresa is repulsed by their loss of self and dignity in the need for a man as a meal ticket and a shield. She recognises that their capitulation is a response to very real pressures, and she is acutely embarrassed by their private desperation. After her wedding, Malfi entreats Teresa, 'Don't think too badly of me.' Anne, tormented by insecurity, is witnessed by Teresa sobbing and beating her head on the bathroom floor on the night of the wedding. Ellen, Teresa's thirty-ish, town-educated rural cousin, makes a humiliating last-ditch play for the neighbour's yokel son.

For all her percipience and her determination not to become one of 'the bloodless rout of women', Teresa is herself a victim of these pressures. Though she struggles bitterly for her own money, she still has the emotional block of female conditioning. There is considerable irony in the masochistic role in which she casts herself in relation to Jonathan Crow. Her obsessive love for him is fed by her own neediness rather than any reciprocal devotion. Fearful of failure, rejection and loneliness, she latches on to a man, just like Kitty, Ellen and Malfi. Ironically, women like Teresa who resist the lure of material security, and remain 'free', are demoralised by poverty and low status. The devastating effect of Crow's manipulations on Clara Endor, the maid Lucy, and Teresa herself demonstrates the vulnerability of women who love unabashedly without the social fortification of marriage.

Throughout For Love Alone, Stead plays with the concept of insanity, counterpoising extremes of behaviour which are essentially sane, or adaptive, with those that are self-destructive. Stead suggests that rebellious, self-interested behaviour on the past of a woman may be labelled 'mad' by those who wish to control her. Teresa's family accuses her of unbalanced mind in her determination to travel:

> "You're leaving the home empty," cried her father.
> "Fill it with other people then."
> "You're selfish and hard."
> "She's mad," said Lance furiously.
> "Chateaubriand says you have to be mad to get get out of certain situations."
> "Who's he?" said Lance (p.288).

The novel both employs and questions the conventional

association of romantic passion with insanity. In the early part of Teresa's quest, thwarted need is linked with madness. During her exploratory escape to the Narara Valley, Teresa is told the embarrassing story of her epileptic cousin Lily, whose feverish flamboyance has dark intimations of nymphomania. Teresa's over-imaginative nature is fascinated by this, and she asks if the fits are hereditary:

> At school they taught that genius is to madness near akin, and she had already remarked that men were attracted by a little madness. Of course she had not her cousin's talents, she had never done those things that Aunt Teresa had murmured so quickly, but it might be cultivated (p.148).

On the way home from the neighbour's house with Ellen one night, Teresa is chilled by the plaintive yells of the local madman. She hears later that he and his fiancée had been forbidden to marry because of hereditary insanity:

> "Oh, why didn't they let them get married?" cried Teresa. "Oh the poor things! But how can they expect mad people to get better if they have no husbands and wives? Why, I should go mad if they shut me up that way. Why, we should all go mad, if we were shut up and not allowed to get married (p.161).

Here, Teresa's ingenuous outburst highlights the ironic bind of women's social choices. Not getting married means closing off the life of the senses, and living in isolation. Getting married means compromising in ways which deform individual pride and integrity.

The senile old man who exposes his genitals to her is a further image of frustrated humanity.

As the novel progresses, the theme of insanity becomes more closely and ominously associated with Teresa

herself. Her attempts to act on her desire for Jonathan have vicious backlashes of self-torment:

> She believed no woman had ever done this bitter, shameful, brave thing before. If people knew of it they would think she was pushed to it by fear, as she was. If it were known, her family would insult her, people on the boat would vomit jokes as she passed. They were safe, closed up with their fiancés, and their marriages to come. She was in the howling wilderness. It was like a crime, she felt, in her terror, and she was a lost woman. (pp.225-226).

Teresa's horror at her act, and her self-punishing invective, create a classic Female Gothic atmosphere of guiltiness and anxiety.

In the perversity of her need, Teresa practises the art of self-renunciation as though, like the archetypal female victims in fairy-tales, she could earn her fulfilment with suffering. The perceptive Miss Haviland writes of Teresa's regime of self-starvation and exhausting walking that:

> ... it reminded her of one of those princesses in Grimm or Anderson (which was it — perhaps both) who had to make twelve shirts out of nettles before she could be liberated, or else stayed thirty years in an oven and came out at the end to meet a prince, both still young and superlatively fair. (p.316).

Teresa's refusal to feed her depleted body recalls Laura's anorexic self-deprivation in The Watch Tower. Both women seem to be attempting to purge themselves of uncomfortable feelings, needs and desires, by refusing to acknowledge physical hunger.

Contorting her nature, Teresa tries to accommodate Jonathan's contradictory attitudes to female personality and sexuality. Like her father Andrew Hawkins, he pays

lip service to an ideal of robust womanhood, but is much more comfortable with docility and passivity. Teresa takes to heart Jonathan's oblique messages about her low self-worth, and strives to be deserving of him. Her eventual recognition of the impasse of their relationship, and the horrifying consequences of her infatuation with him, brings bitter self-recrimination. She feels herself to be 'distorted and lost' more profoundly than ever before. The madness of possessive, obsessive love is given particular emphasis in the character of Harry's lover Manette, whose intensity serves as a caricature of Teresa's own:

> He had stuck to her because of her primitive force. She could always force him, in the last resort, by her deep, broken, anguished voice, her yells and the horrors of her soul which she put into words, to quell and terrify him. How many times had she threatened to commit suicide, and to murder, with such wild looks, with staring eyes, loosened hair, glabrous cheek, black shouting mouth and the stormy throwing about of her thick-set powerful body, he had never the heart to oppose her (p.469).

The basically decent Harry gives Manette much less cause for suffering than the emotionally crippled Jonathan has given Teresa, but the point is made just the same.

Teresa's nightmarish sense of being adrift and alone is diverted from the self-enclosure of madness by the solicitude of James Quick, whom she comes to love. Stead presents their intense romantic love as akin to insanity in its heightened consciousness of the real:

> Love is blind is the dictum, whereas, with me at least, Love sees everything; like insanity, it must not reveal its thoughts (p.460).

For Teresa, marriage implies 'a different kind of knowledge' and 'each part of her new state merited thoughts and dissection'; unlike Quick, for whom 'it was part of a plan of action' (p.460).

The state of individuality and wholeness Teresa retrieves through her life with Quick liberates her sexually and emotionally. Accordingly, self-expression replaces self-denial as the informing principle of her life, and her new restlessness and energy are palpable. She is able to distance herself from the tormented past of her love for Jonathan — 'I can't believe I ever loved that man' — but not discount the enormity of such futile suffering:

> After a while, Teresa sighed bitterly.
> "It's dreadful to think that it will go
> on being repeated for ever, he — and me!
> What's there to stop it?" (p.502).

Stead does not offer any palliatives to Teresa's anguish at her own mistake, and that of countless other women before and since. The novel implies that such pointless suffering will continue until the conditions which predispose women to emotional pain are removed.

This thesis includes White's The Aunt's Story as female quest fiction in which madness figures, because there are points of correspondence between this novel and the others discussed. Theodora shares many of the characteristics of these other questing women characters. Her wilful asceticism recalls that of Teresa. Like Nora, she reacts to the cruelty of human beings by withdrawal into solitude, eccentricity, and moments of schizophrenia.

Theodora embarks on an odyssey of truth-seeking

which involves exploration of the self both as a social being and as an individual. Her entry into the self is more mystic than that of Teresa or of Nora, however. White seems less interested in Theodora as a woman undertaking a quest for self-understanding than he is in her as an idiosyncratic soul, isolated and perplexed in the face of human experience. Theodora's femaleness does, however, determine her social experience in important ways, enabling White to dissect the particular violence of female adolescence and adulthood.

The attribution of female gender seems to be White's way of giving a character another cross to bear. It is important that Theodora be plain, spinsterish, intelligent, and spiritually finely tuned. Because she is ruthlessly unconventional as a woman, she suffers more, perhaps, than a man of similar understanding would have done.

The Aunt's Story unravels Theodora's life, bringing into focus crucial incidents and influences in her childhood and adulthood so as to explain how she has become so alienated from herself as to be '... this thing a spinster which at best, becomes that institution an aunt' (p.12). Though the three sections of the novel indicate changes of place and time, they are given continuity by Theodora's extended voyage into the emotions of her past. This quest is the psychological process by which she comes to terms with the disparate parts of her own nature. In this she is like Nora in Tirra Lirra by the River.

Unfortunately, for Theodora to live according to her nature is to be mad in the world's eyes. Her essential

solitariness is established early in the novel. Her awkward personality alienates most of the people she comes into contact with, and she finds more solace in nature than in society. Perversely, she acts in ways which feed this sense of apartness. The shooting of the little hawk with which she identifies herself is a symbolic rejection of even the possibility of love, and an attempt to anaesthetise feeling:

> She felt exhausted, but there was no longer any pain. She was as negative as air (p.71).

Theodora's response to the pain of acute perception is to repress and punish herself, closing the door on her emotional life. She refers to the means by which:

> ... the great monster Self will be destroyed, and that desirable state achieved, which resembles, one would imagine, nothing more than air or water. She did not doubt that the years would contribute, rubbing and extracting, but never enough (p.128).

After her mother's death, Theodora goes away to pursue humility in 'the great fragmentation of maturity', subjecting herself to the bizarre personal relationships of the Hôtel du Midi. Theodora's quest to exorcise the past is largely successful, but her attempt to live as a social being is abandoned in 'Holstius'. She is unable to live and be like other people, she thinks, because she cannot efface herself:

> ... there was no safeguard against the violence of personality. This was less controllable than fire. In the bland corn song, in the theme of days, Theodora Goodman was a discord. Those mouths which attempted her black note rejected it wryly. (p.260).

Her behaviour is quite consistent with this knowledge, but to observers it is evidence of madness. Holstius, her inner oracle with touches of an omniscient Patrick White, recommends that she submit herself to the ministrations of those who 'prescribe the reasonable life'.

By this ending, White appears to be suggesting that Theodora's personality will survive even this attempt to reduce it, and that like the rose on her black hat, she will continue to lead a life of her own. We are asked to believe that in a moment of schizophrenic clarity, she understands the truth about herself and her quest. What this truth might be, as Livio Dobrez acknowledges, is elusive, but it involves acceptance of inner conflicts.[21] The final inner balance asserted by White seems much less convincing than his expressionist rendering of the different facets of Theodora's dissolving and reuiniting self. John Colmer's understanding of the unsatisfactoriness of the novel's ending is helpful:

> The meaning of The Aunt's Story turns on the paradox that only the mad are sane. But it is something of a weakness that it should be rendered so realistically by the arrival of a doctor to take Theodora away at the end of the novel.[22]

White's assumption that spiritual integrity will survive institutionalisation invites scepticism. Isolation from the world might bring Theodora a little closer to the 'pureness of being' and 'humility' White consistently endorses in the novel, but at the cost of betraying the self she has so painfully come to know and accept. The acute sympathy White has for Theodora earlier in the novel

seems to have fallen away in the third section. Theodora is no longer a complicated, vulnerable individual with the courage to pursue understanding; but a stick-like figure topped by a hat, tottering tragi-comically into a future of impersonal rooms.

White's careful exposition of the background to Theodora's mental states is not done justice by this unsubtlety. The other novels make more interesting reading on the ways in which female insanity is socially induced.

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FOOTNOTES

Synopsis:

1 Ellen Morgan, 'Humanbecoming: Form & Focus in the Neo-Feminist Novel', S. Koppelman Cornillon (ed.), Images of Women in Fiction (Ohio, Bowling Green University Popular Press, rev.edn.1973), p.184.

Introduction:

1 Margaret Drabble's Jerusalem the Golden (1967), Margaret Atwood's Surfacing (1972) and Lady Oracle (1976), and Joan Barfoot's Gaining Ground (1978), are other examples from British, Canadian and American literature.

2 Robyn Davidson, Tracks (London, Jonathan Cape, 1980).

3 Christina Stead, For Love Alone (1945: Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1966).

4 Elizabeth Harrower, The Watch Tower (London, Macmillan, 1966).

5 Patrick White, The Aunt's Story (1948: Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1976).

6 Jessica Anderson, Tirra Lirra by the River (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1978).

7 Annis Pratt, Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction (Great Britain, The Harvester Press, 1982), p.11.

8 See Annis Pratt, 'Archetypal Approaches to the New Feminist Criticism' in Bucknell Review, Vol. XXI Spring 1973.

9 Pratt, Archetypal Patterns.

10 Carol Pearson and Katherine Pope, The Female Hero in American and British Literature (New York, R.R. Bowker, 1981).

11 Phyllis Chesler, Women and Madness (New York, Doubleday, 1972).

12 Pratt, Archetypal Patterns, p.6.

13 Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1957), pp.192-193.

14 See Pratt, Archetypal Patterns, p.36, and Pearson and Pope, p.49.

15 Pearson and Pope, p.55.

16 Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces (1949: second edn., New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1968).

17 Pearson and Pope, p.83.

Chapter One:

1 See Annis Pratt, Archetypal Patterns; and Carol P. Christ, 'Margaret Atwood: The Surfacing of Women's Spiritual Quest and Vision', Signs,' Winter 1976, Vol.II, no.2.

2 Pratt, Archetypal Patterns, p.21.

3 Christ, p.325.

4 Ibid., p.326.

5 Susan Higgins, 'For Love Alone: A Female Odyssey?'. Southerly, Vol. XXXVIII, no.4, 1978, p.428.

6 Ellen Moers, Literary Women (London, The Women's Press, 1978), p.126.

7 Ibid., p.130.

8 Ibid.

9 See Martha Quest's obsessive walking in the early part of Doris Lessing's The Four-Gated City, and the street walking of Jean Rhys's hungry heroines.

10 Higgins, p.441.

11 Moers, p.140.

12 Margaret Atwood's Surfacing, and Joan Barfoot's Gaining Ground, have protagonists whose experience of nature is analogous to that of Davidson.

13 Annis Pratt, 'Women and Nature in Modern Fiction', Contemporary Literature, Vol. XXIII, no.4, 1972.

14 Ibid., p.477.

15 Patrick White, Voss (1957: Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1963).

16 See Chapter Three for a more detailed discussion of the ending of The Aunt's Story.

Chapter Two:

1 Ann Ronald, 'The Female Faust', Cheryl L. Brown and Karen Olson (eds.), Feminist Criticism: Essays on Theory, Poetry and Prose (Metuchen, New Jersey, The Scarecrow Press, 1978), p.212.

2 Ibid., p.213.

3 Ibid., p.216.

4 Kay Iseman, 'Our Fathers' Daughters: the problem of filiation for women writers of fiction', Norma Grieve and Patricia Grimshaw (eds.), Australian Women: Feminist Perspectives (Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1981).

5 Iseman, p.109.

6 Higgins, p.432.

7 See Anderson, pp.93 and 97.

8 Margaret Adams, 'The Compassion Trap', Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Moran (eds.), Woman in Sexist Society (New York, Basic Books, 1971), p.402.

9 Ibid., p.401.

10 Ibid., p.404.

Chapter Three:

1 R.D. Laing, The Divided Self (1959: Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1975), p.17.

2 Moers, ch. 5.

3 Ibid., p.107.

4 Nola Adams 'Gothic Sensibility in Fiction by Australian Women', Paper delivered at the Association for the Study of Australian Literature Conference, Adelaide, 13 May, 1982

5 Ibid.

6 Luise Eichenbaum and Susie Orbach, Outside In... Inside Out: A Feminist Psychoanalytic Approach, (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1982), p.84.

7 Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1979), ch.2.

8 Ibid., p.54.

9 Ibid.

10 Eichenbaum and Orbach claim that research indicates that 95% of agoraphobics are women (p.87). Hilde Bruch (see note 17) remarks that anorexia nervosa in the male is exceedingly rare (p.304).

11 Lord Alfred Tennyson, 'The Lady of Shalott', Robert W. Hill, Jr. (ed.), Tennyson's Poetry, (Norton, New York, 1971), ll.109-117.

12 Chesler, p.41.

13 For a discussion of the function of the psychological double in women's literature, see Gilbert and Gubar, pp.77-80 and pp.359-362.

14 Gilbert and Gubar, p.360.

15 Carole Ferrier mentions this female alienation in 'Is an "Images of Woman" Methodology adequate for reading Elizabeth Harrower's The Watch Tower?', Shirley Walker (ed.), Who is She? (St. Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1983), pp.198-199.

16 Laing, pp.75-76.

17 Hilde Bruch, Eating Disorders (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974).

18 Ibid., p.50.

19 Pearson and Pope, p.238.

20 See Laing, p.17, for a definition of the schizoid.

21 L.A.C. Dobrez, 'Australia and the Legend of the Forties', Review of National Literatures, Vol.11 (New York, Griffon House Publications, 1982), p.129.

22 John Colmer, 'The Quest Motif in Patrick White', Review of National Literatures, p.200.

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